25¢
in Canada
30 cents

Adventure

October 1st
1929

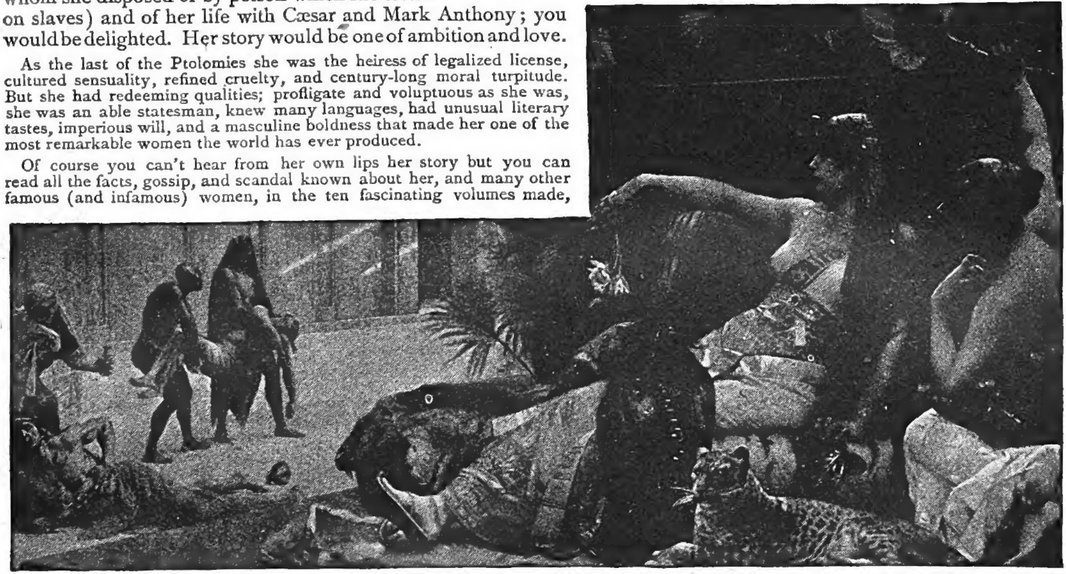
A NOVEL
of
MYSTERIOUS
INDIA

by

TALBOT
MUNDY

*Published Twice
A Month*

WRIGLEY'S
SPEARMINT
THE PERFECT GUM
THE FLAVOR LASTS
MINT LEAF FLAVOR
Bewitching Mint Leaf Flavor



How Would You Like to Spend an Hour With CLEOPATRA?

IF you could sit down beside this beautiful woman and hear from her own lips the strange story of her marriage to her brothers (one of whom she disposed of by poison which she tested on slaves) and of her life with Cæsar and Mark Anthony; you would be delighted. Her story would be one of ambition and love.

As the last of the Ptolomies she was the heiress of legalized license, cultured sensuality, refined cruelty, and century-long moral turpitude. But she had redeeming qualities; profligate and voluptuous as she was, she was an able statesman, knew many languages, had unusual literary tastes, imperious will, and a masculine boldness that made her one of the most remarkable women the world has ever produced.

Of course you can't hear from her own lips her story but you can read all the facts, gossip, and scandal known about her, and many other famous (and infamous) women, in the ten fascinating volumes made, **As the New York Herald says, by the "Tiffanys of Publishers" on**

WOMAN

Now Offered in a Special Low Priced Edition Free on Approval

YOUR CHANCE TO LEARN ABOUT WOMAN

Read about the woman who was forced to drink her husband's health from her father's skull and her revenge; how the women of Weinsberg carried their husbands to safety on their shoulders—and why. Learn how Helen of Troy caused a ten years' war—and how a Princess drowned herself to stop further wars over her beauty.

FAMOUS LOVERS

This is your chance to read about the famous lovers, Heloise and Abelard; about Margarida, who unsuspecting ate her lover's heart; and how Emperor Orkham beheaded his beautiful wife Theodora before his ministers who objected because she was a Christian.

HAREMS AND SLAVES

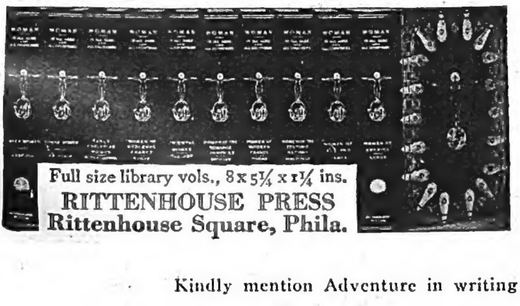
You penetrate the harem with its beautiful slaves. You meet the *hetæræ* with whom the ancient Greeks found solace. You see the Inca Sun Virgins and the famous Vestal Virgins of Rome. You learn about the geisha girls of Japan.

WOMAN—TENDER AND CRUEL

On one hand you have Saint Rosalie and the miracle of roses or Lady Godiva riding naked through Coventry to help her people. On the other you have the Russian countess who, in winter, had water poured over nude girls to make frozen statues for her garden; the French women who sat unmoved as heads dropped from the guillotine; and Empress Irene who blinded her son—yet was made a saint.

MANY CURIOUS STORIES

You read the curious stories of how Princess Eleanor proved to council she was not a leper; how Empress Eudocia was expelled from the palace almost naked; how an emperor's sister was forced to appear in court tied in a bag full of cats which were pricked with pins; and how Empress Helena buried her husband and sons with her own hands to save their bodies from the dogs.



Full size library vols., 8 x 5¼ x 1¼ ins.

RITTENHOUSE PRESS
Rittenhouse Square, Phila.

A FEW OF THE STRANGE TALES

You will read how Emperor Theophilus chose his bride; how the Suliote women, facing dishonorable surrender, jumped to death. You will learn how two gentlemen threw dice to decide which was the father of a child of that beauty, Ninon de Lenclos; of how her son unsuspecting fell in love with her and, learning the truth, shot himself.

YOU MEET FAMOUS WOMEN

You meet Catherine the Great, Jeanne d'Arc, Madame du Barry, Empress Josephine, Marie Antoinette, Nell Gwyn, Messalina, Lucrezia Borgia, the Queen of Sheba, Jezebel, and hundreds of others.

SENSATIONAL SAVINGS TO YOU

The $150.00 limited edition on Japan paper paid for the plates and allows us to offer you this edition, from the same plates, for a fraction of that price. We knew that people would jump to get a set at a low price, so by ordering a large quantity in a slack season we got the lowest cost. But only a few sets remain; soon they will be sold.

COMPLETE SETS FREE ON APPROVAL

We will send you the ten de luxe volumes bound in royal purple cloth stamped in gold. In them you will meet famous women from ancient Carthage, Greece, and Rome; from the harems of Turkey and the slave markets of Babylon, and from the Far East.

GOOD WOMEN AND BAD

You will meet queens, saints, sinners, Amazons, murderers, martyrs, courtesans, bacchantes, and Spartans. Good women and bad—you meet them all. Take advantage of your opportunity. Don't miss it. You get over 4000 pages of pleasure just by signing the coupon.

SEND NO MONEY

Enjoy these books at our expense for 5 days. If you don't find them entrancing, want them for your library, and think them a wonderful baragain—return them at our expense. But once seen you will want to keep them. MAIL COUPON NOW

ACT NOW. DON'T DELAY. IMPORTANT.

Wise readers will rapidly snap up the last of this edition. To be sure of your set tear off the coupon while you have it in your hand.

THE RITTENHOUSE PRESS
RITTENHOUSE SQUARE, PHILA.

You may send for inspection, charges paid, the 10-vol. set of *WOMAN*, bound in purple cloth. I will return the set in 5 days or send you $1 as a first payment and $2 a month for 11 months. *Canada (duty paid) add one $2 payment.* (Adv. 10-29)

NAME..

ADDRESS..

☐ Check here if you wish with the maroon Spanish leather finish fabrikoid and change payments to 14 months.

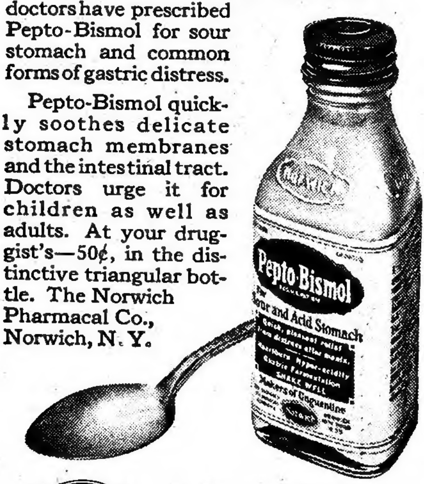
STOMACH SOUR ?

Why suffer?

Quick, pleasant relief, as prescribed by doctors for 25 years

A HEARTY meal. Then—the misery, the pain of indigestion! Is this your experience? It need not be. Today—and for 25 years, in fact—doctors have prescribed Pepto-Bismol for sour stomach and common forms of gastric distress.

Pepto-Bismol quickly soothes delicate stomach membranes and the intestinal tract. Doctors urge it for children as well as adults. At your druggist's—50¢, in the distinctive triangular bottle. The Norwich Pharmacal Co., Norwich, N. Y.



Norwich
MAKERS OF UNGUENTINE

Doctors urge it for children and infants too, because of its mild effective action.

Pepto-Bismol

ON THE OCEAN FRONT
The Breakers
ATLANTIC CITY, N. J.
HILLMAN MANAGEMENT

THE DRAKE HOTEL is wonderfully located. On the lake, yet within easy walking distance of the heart of downtown Chicago. For tempting food and remarkable service, THE DRAKE is known far and wide. Rates are reasonable—as low as five dollars a day single room with bath, six double. Special discounts for extended stays. Write for Illustrated Booklet, Edition 20.

Under the Blackstone management known the world over

The DRAKE HOTEL Chicago

$1643 ***in one month from Short Stories!***

This is the record of Lieut. Arthur J. Burks, successful Palmer student. It is but one month of the year in which he fully expects to make $18,000 from short stories. Another student writes: *"I've sold two stories lately, one for $110 and the other, for which I received $160, has been accepted by the same magazine."*

You too can make writing pay. If you have imagination and the urge to write, the Palmer Institute can help you to produce stories that magazines will buy.

Many famous authors endorse Palmer Courses. Katharine Newlin Burt, writer of many stories in Harper's, McCall's and Cosmopolitan, says: "I'd have started 10 years sooner on a literary career but there was no Palmer Institute then."

Send coupon for booklet and full information.

PALMER INSTITUTE OF AUTHORSHIP
CLAYTON HAMILTON... PRESIDENT
Dept. 127-X, Palmer Building, Hollywood, Calif.
I am interested in:
☐ English and Self-Expression
☐ Short Story Writing
☐ Photoplay Writing
☐ Writers' Criticism Service

Name____________________

Address____________________

All correspondence strictly confidential. No salesman will call.

LAW STUDY AT HOME

Become a lawyer. Legally trained men win high positions and big success in business and public life. Be independent. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training. Earn

$5,000 to $10,000 Annually

We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL.B. conferred. LaSalle students found among practicing attorneys of every state. We furnish all text material, including fourteen-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 64-page "Law Guide" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 1076-L, Chicago
The World's Largest Business Training Institution

ADVENTURE
Oct. 1st, 1929

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois.

Volume 72
Number 2

"I think that the letter that you sent to my employer had great weight in his decision to employ me. I like the position that I have very well." William L. Olsasky, Shawnee, Kansas

"I am very well satisfied with the results of your and my efforts to get me a job in the drafting rooms of the Michelmann Steel Construction Co., Quincy. The gentleman there spoke highly of your correspondence courses." Marcus Linse, Danvers, Ill.

"Thank you very much for your assistance, which enabled me to secure a position as draftsman with the Mississippi Valley Power Company." Lowell Perry, Fort Smith, Ark.

"I have obtained a position as a junior draftsman with the Muncie Oil Engine Co. I appreciate your aid in obtaining this position very much." Maurice N. Bareham, Muncie, Ind.

Who Else wants a good Drafting Job?

DURING the past few months we have placed HUNDREDS of former clerks, mechanics and beginners in fine positions—with Contractors, Architects, and in big manufacturing plants. (Read a few typical letters above.)

These men came to us because they were dissatisfied with their earnings and with their future prospects. Now they are doing work they like—making good money—**and have a real chance to advance still farther.**

If you are trying to solve a similar personal problem, we invite you to get in touch with us. We'll be glad to tell you how you, too, can get a well-paid Drafting job—without risking a penny of your money.

Why we recommend DRAFTING

We believe it will pay you to investigate Drafting. Many of our most successful Contractors and Engineers STARTED in the Drafting room. That opportunity to get to the top—to meet big men—to take charge of important projects is the best feature of Drafting.

The work is interesting and pleasant. The hours are easy. You work with a wonderful bunch of fellows. Salaries range from $35 to $50 a week for beginners, up to $100 and more a week for experienced Draftsmen.

One man puts it this way: "I really didn't know exactly what Drafting was. I thought it required artistic talent and a high school or college education. I was much surprised to find it wasn't any harder to learn than my former trade of plastering."

NOW — Jobs for STUDENTS!

For the past five years the American School has provided a free Employment service for all who **completed** this home-training in Drafting. Now we have found a way to place all STUDENTS when only half-way through the course. Mail coupon for complete information of this remarkable service.

Promotion for office and factory workers

If you're a shop man you can realize that the man who **makes** the plans is a step above the workman who **follows** the blue-print. If you're a clerk you know that copying figures all day cannot compare in salary or responsibility with creating designs and plans of buildings, machinery, or the products of industry.

How are you going to get away from routine work—how can you even get a $10 a week increase in pay—how can you get into a line where there is a real future? Let us show you that Drafting offers you all these things—in less time, and with less effort than any other line.

FREE--Drafting Book

Over 70,000 fine Drafting positions have been advertised in the past year. Electrical, Architectural, Mechanical, Structural and Automotive lines, all need Draftsmen. Here is one of the biggest fields you can get into. Get our free 36-page book and see how easily you can learn and how we help you get a well-paid position as soon as you are ready for it.

The American School **Dept. D-72**
Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago

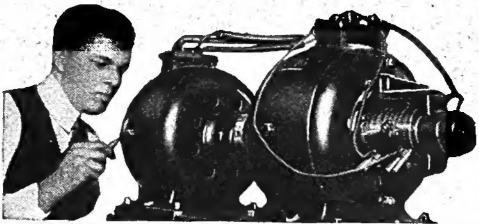
Please send FREE and without obligation 36-page Drafting Book and your offer to help me get a Drafting job when only half-way through the course.

Name.................................Age..........

St. No...

City...................State...................

The American School
Dept. D-72, Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago, Ill.



Learn Electricity

In 12 Weeks—In the Great Shops of Coyne

The whole world of electricity is open to the Coyne trained man because the COYNE big, newly enlarged course is *complete* and trains you BY ACTUAL WORK on a vast outlay of electrical equipment. NO BOOKS—NO CLASSES—START ANY TIME.

NOT A CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL

We don't make you a mere "paper" electrician. You become a *real* EXPERT through actual work at COYNE.

YOU DON'T NEED ADVANCED EDUCATION

or experience! Any man who is ambitious and willing can earn at Coyne.

EARN $200 TO $800 A MONTH

No books or useless theory. You are trained on everything from door bells to power plants, everything to make you a $50 to $200 a week COYNE-trained EXPERT.

Write Today Send for big free book, special FREE R. R. fare offer, details of *FREE Life Membership* and two FREE courses, including Radio and Aviation Electricity. Write today.

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 69-03, Chicago

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL, H. C. Lewis, Pres.
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 69-03, Chicago, Ill.

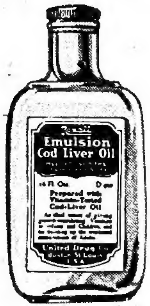
Please send me your Free, Illustrated Book on Electricity and Coyne. No obligation. Give details of special offer too.

Name...

Address..

City ....*State*............

Every Atom Throbbing with Strength

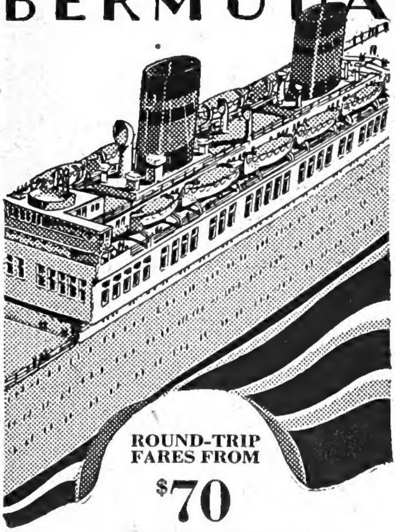


High vitamin content cod liver oil from Norway—300 times richer than creamery butter—emulsified—made pleasant to take. Rexall Cod Liver Oil Emulsion is sold only at Rexall Stores. Save with safety at your

Rexall
DRUG STORE

There is one near you. You will recognize it by this sign. Liggett's are also Rexall stores.

BERMUDA



ROUND-TRIP FARES FROM
$70

Inclusive Rates on Application

48 hours of Transatlantic luxury each way on the new 20,000-ton motorship "Bermuda" or the "Fort Victoria". Sailings twice weekly.

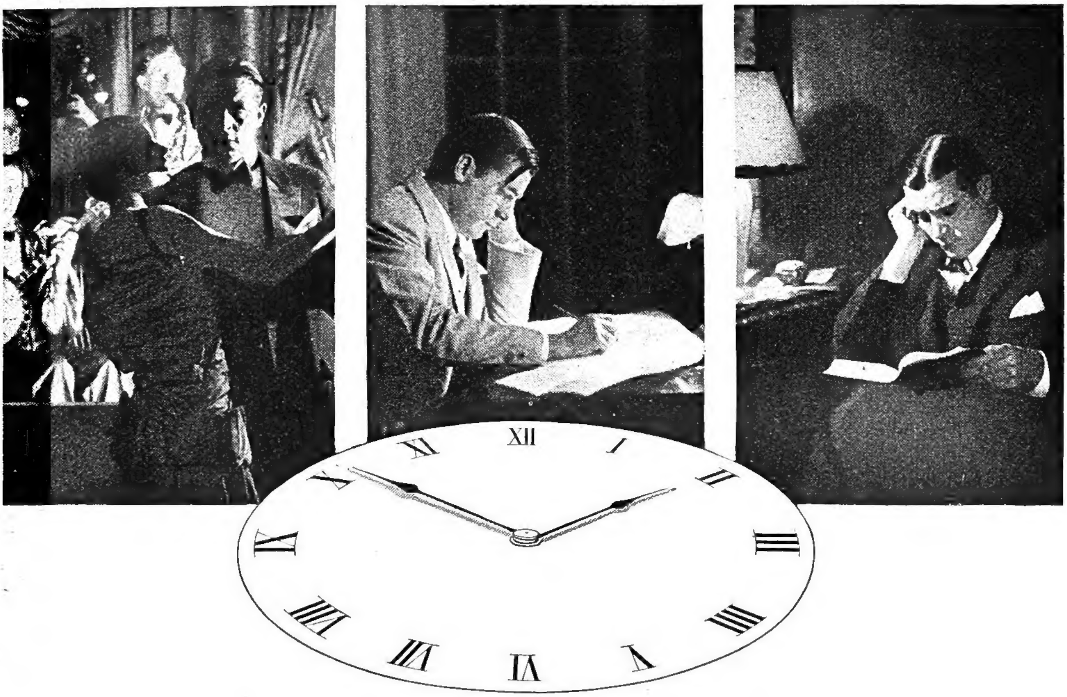
FURNESS
Bermuda Line
34 Whitehall St. . . . 565 Fifth Ave., New York

CINCINNATI'S FINEST

Located in the heart of the business, theatre and shopping sections, you will find the Hotel Sinton an ideal stopping place.

RATES
$2.50
and UP

Hotel Sinton
CINCINNATI
JOHN L. HORGAN - - Managing Director



Rob yourself of sleep . . . *but you can't rob the* **Gillette Blade** *of its sure, smooth shave*

A FACE drawn and tight from lack of sleep, a slapdash lather and a hurry-up shave—it can't ruin the even temper of a Gillette Blade, even though it may wreck your own.

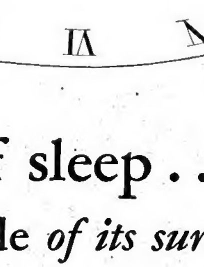
On such mornings lather extra thoroughly and treat yourself to a fresh Gillette Blade. You're sure then of the smooth, even, comfortable shave which has been honed and stropped into *every* Gillette Blade by machines adjusted to one ten-thousandth of an inch.

Every Gillette Blade *must* be even and sure. To guarantee that, four out of every nine of our blade department employees are inspectors and are paid a bonus for detecting every blade that won't do a superb job of shaving.

No two men have identically the same kind of beard. No man gives his Gillette the same kind of job to do every morning. A dozen varying conditions affect the comfort of your shave. The Gillette Blade alone remains constant.

Eight out of ten American men count on the Gillette Blade to do its job *well* every morning. It does. Witness the smooth faces of American men today. Gillette Safety Razor Co., Boston, U.S.A.

King C Gillette



THE only individual in history, ancient or modern, whose picture and signature are found in every city and town, in every country in the world, is King C. Gillette. This picture and signature are universal sign-language for a perfect shave.

Gillette

★ **Gillette** ★

Quick Promotion

and HOW to Get It

One sure way to get ahead, to climb faster than your fellows, is to know **your job** and that of the man **ahead of you.** The college man doesn't always have an advantage, for now any man can have at **his finger tips** all of the facts pertaining to modern finance, factory production, business management, sales management, advertising, accounting, credits and all of the factors so important in **modern business.**

Twelve big books, 3000 pages, covering the complete field of **Practical Business** prepared for men who want to get ahead but who haven't the time or the money to go to school, will be sent to you absolutely **FREE!** Yes, not one penny need be paid until you have examined these books; until you have proved to your own satisfaction their amazing value from the standpoint of **making more money.** These books are brimful of information of great value to professional and business men, to department heads, clerks, bookkeepers, correspondents—in fact to anyone in any way interested in **solving business problems.**

The Man Who Knows Is The Man Who Wins

This is always true; there is no doubt about it. Then why not take advantage of our great **Free Offer.** Let us send you these books for 10 days upon our **no money** offer. Look them over; test the new Jiffy Index which makes vital facts **instantly** available. See how easy it is to know what you want to know without long hours of grinding study. Note the accuracy of the answers to **every** business problem.

Extras You Get NOW!

To every man sending now for these newest guides to bigger pay we will send an extra volume containing a complete self quiz reading course free, a membership in the American Technical Society, entitling you to full consultation privileges for one year with 18 business experts, and in **addition to all of these** our guarantee that if you do not find these books the most helpful that you have ever seen anywhere and if you do not agree that the small price and easy terms makes them tremendously valuable to any man, you can return them and owe us nothing.

Thousands of pages, beautifully bound in flexible embossed covers, tell the secrets of the world's prominent executives in a simple, interesting and non-technical way which anybody can understand and use—finance, budgets, production, industrial management, sales, advertising, accounting, higher accountancy, credits, purchasing, employment, auditing, costs, commercial law—all fully covered. Send now, get these books, put them to every test you want to and then **if you are satisfied** send only $2.00 and then $3.00 a month until a total of only $39.80 is paid.

SEND THIS COUPON TODAY!

American Technical Society, Dept. B726
Drexel Avenue at 58th St., Chicago, Ill.

You may send me the 12 big books on Practical Business Administration on your special offer for 10 days FREE examination. I am to pay nothing but the few cents express charges when the books arrive, and then if I decide to keep them I will send you $2.00 and after that $3.00 a month until the special price of $39.80 is paid. If I am not more than satisfied I will return the books, charges collect, and will owe you nothing. You are to include free the extra volume which contains a complete self quiz reading course and also a certificate entitling me to membership in the American Technical Society with full consultation privileges for one year.

Name..

Address..

Employer's Name..

Employer's Address..

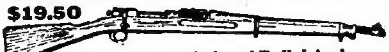
Men's
Strap
Watch
LATEST
MODEL
$3.69
SAVE
50%

A fully **GUARANTEED** accurate timekeeper—tested and adjusted jewelled Swiss movement—artistically engraved case as illustrated—radium dial—genuine leather strap. Order This Bargain Today. **Pay on delivery only $3.69.** *We pay postage.*

"FEDCO", U. S. Swiss Agents,
561 Broadway, New York, N.Y., Dept. L-1044.

SPRINGFIELD RIFLE, Model 1903

$19.50



Assembled and Refinished

8¾ pounds, 43 inches long, 24 inch barrel. Offered without bayonet, $19.50. Packing charge 50c extra. Ball cartridges $3.50 per 100. New catalog, illustrated, 380 pages of Army Navy equipment, pistols, guns, uniforms, saddles, for 50 cents.

Special new circular for 2c stamp. *Established 1865*

Francis Bannerman Sons, 501 B'way, N.Y. City

THE MEN IN HER LIFE

By WARNER FABIAN

Read this throbbing and passionate novel by the author of "FLAMING YOUTH"

You will find it in

Everybody's *Combined with* Romance

Easy to Play
Easy to Pay

FREE BOOK

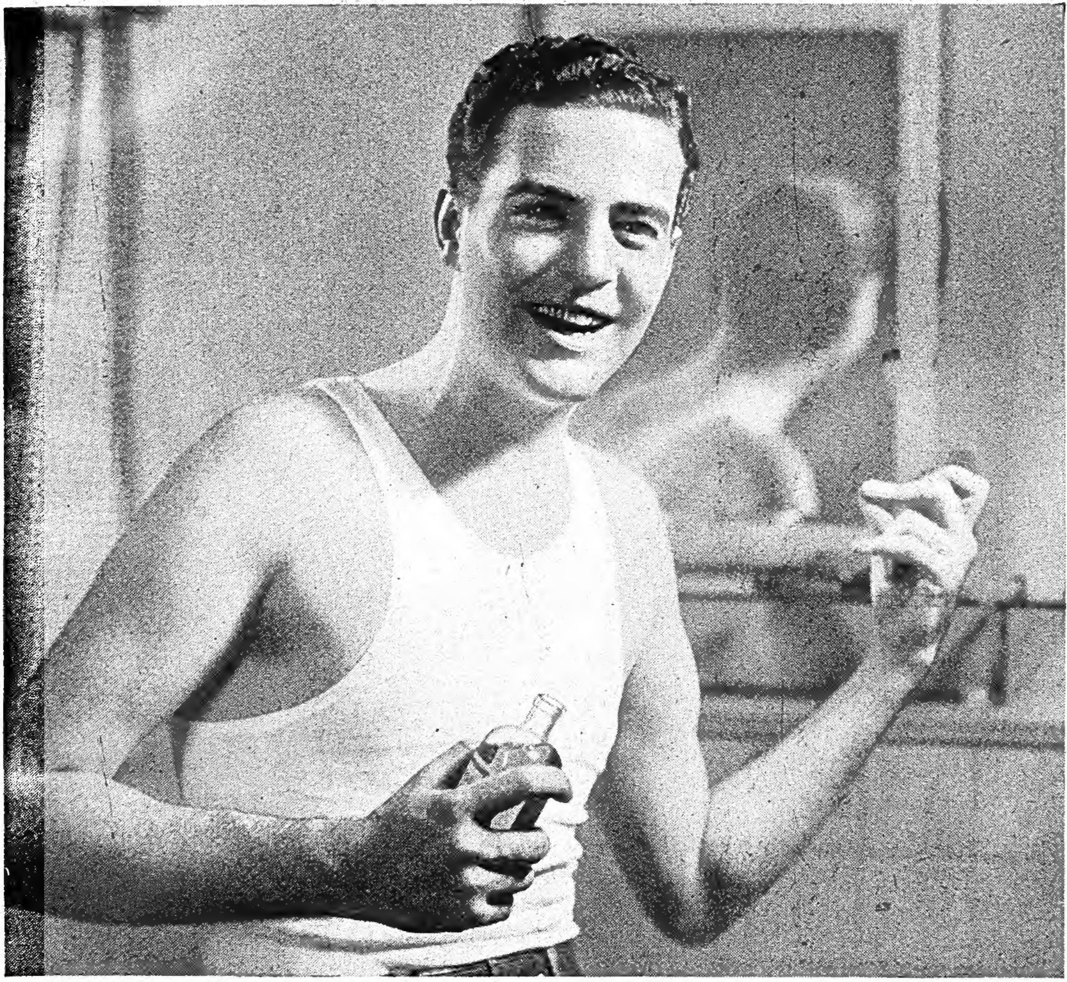
Just send your address and we will mail you Interesting Book describing that most popular of all instruments — the

SAXOPHONE

The Buescher True-Tone Saxophone is the easiest of all wind instruments to play and one of the most beautiful. You can learn the scale in an hour, and in a few weeks be playing popular music. First 3 lessons free, with each new Saxophone. For home entertainment—church—lodge—school or for Orchestra Dance Music, the Saxophone is the ideal instrument.

FREE TRIAL— We allow 6 days' free trial on any Buescher Saxophone in your own home and arrange easy payments so you can pay while you play. Write for Saxophone Catal

BUESCHER BAND INSTRUMENT CO.
2849 Buescher Block (542) **ELKHART, INDIA**



cools . . . AFTER SHAVING . . . *protects*

If you want a real treat in face comfort, do this tomorrow morning after you shave: Simply douse full strength Listerine on your face.

Immediately you note a glow of health — a tingling, zippy sensation that wakes up your skin.

Then, as Listerine dries, a wonderful feeling of coolness, as though a moist sea breeze were blowing against your cheeks. Gone that feeling of rawness. Gone that burning sensation.

Moreover, it eliminates the risk of infection. Because full strength Listerine, though safe and healing in action, kills germs in counts ranging up to 200,000,000 in 15 seconds.

Try it, madam, as an
ASTRINGENT

The same qualities that make Listerine soothing after shaving, recommend its use by women as an astringent. Incidentally, it is a very economical one. Your wife will be glad to know about it.

LISTERINE

KILLS 200,000,000 GERMS IN FIFTEEN SECONDS

Six Great "Curwoods"
and
24 Issues of Adventure

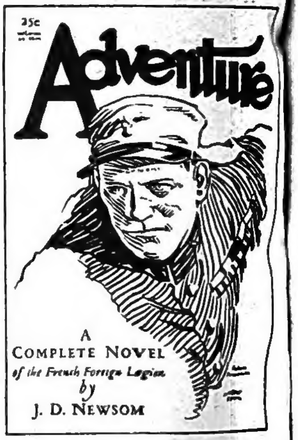
Six great stories you must not miss . . . The Courage of Marge O'Doone and her trained grizzly, Tara . . . Nomad of The North, a tale of two orphans of the wild . . . God's Country and The Woman . . . Baree, Son of Kazan . . . The Grizzly King . . . *and* The Hunted Woman. They are six *"regular"* yarns.

If you feel *"hemmed in"* by tall buildings—if the city has lost its power to grip you—follow Curwood into the romantic land of the great Northwest. This great author knows the animals of the wilderness more intimately than any other writer. His absorbing tales of their adventurous life are laid in the range of country where few hunters go.

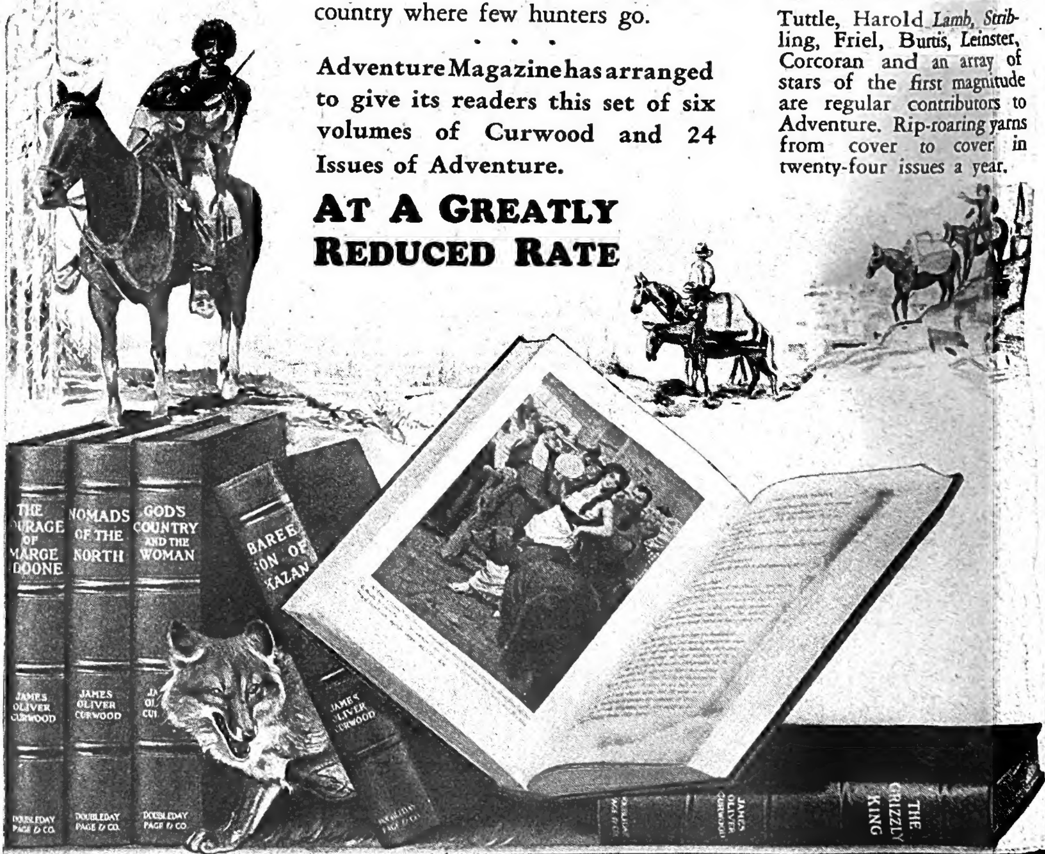
• • •

Adventure Magazine has arranged to give its readers this set of six volumes of Curwood and 24 Issues of Adventure.

AT A GREATLY REDUCED RATE


25c
Adventure
A
Complete Novel
of the French Foreign Legion
by
J. D. Newsom

Tuttle, Harold Lamb, Stribling, Friel, Burtis, Leinster, Corcoran and an array of stars of the first magnitude are regular contributors to Adventure. Rip-roaring yarns from cover to cover in twenty-four issues a year.


The Courage of Marge O'Doone
James Oliver Curwood
Doubleday Page & Co.
Nomads of the North
James Oliver Curwood
Doubleday Page & Co.
God's Country and the Woman
James Oliver Curwood
Doubleday Page & Co.
Baree Son of Kazan
James Oliver Curwood
Doubleday Page & Co.
James Oliver Curwood
The Grizzly King

ADVENTURE, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Enter my subscription to Adventure, 1 year, 24 Issues, and send my Curwood books C.O.D. Enclosed is Four Dollars ($4.00); I will pay the postman Five Dollars ($5.00) when the books arrive—total cost to me of only $9.00 includes books, Adventure and postage.

Name ....

Address ....

....

If you prefer, send only $8.50 with this coupon and your books will be postpaid.

10-1

$9.00 ONLY

Hotel
Knickerbocker
CHICAGO

Fine
Rooms...
Low
Rates!

One
block
from
the
Lake.
A walk
to the
Loop.

A FINER HOTEL
at lower rates.

For discriminating travelers!

A smart yet homelike, quiet atmosphere. Expert hotel management. A trained staff that assures you the alert service found only in the very best hotels. Ideally located. Just north of the "Loop"—3 minutes to business, theatre and shopping center by bus or taxi—or an easy walk.

All spacious outside rooms with bath, shower, circulating ice water . . . Servidor service (minimizing tipping!). Furnished in modern good taste. Every appointment for absolute comfort. Dining room and Coffee Shop.

Cool—Comfortable
Outside Rooms

Make this hotel your Chicago Headquarters . . . you'll appreciate it!

At Walton Place, CHICAGO Opposite *Just East of* *Michigan Blvd.* The Drake

AT YOUR SERVICE FOR YOUR COMFORT

Haven't you a friend you think would enjoy
ADVENTURE?

Hand this coupon to a friend

Anthony Rud, 10-1
Editor—Adventure,
223 Spring St., N. Y. City.

A friend of mine who is a regular reader of Adventure has given me this coupon, good for a complimentary copy of ADVENTURE with no obligations or cost on my part. Please mail to:

Name ....
Street ....
City ....

Salary Increased from $112 to $400 a Month

"My I. C. S. course in Cost Accounting was of great practical help in enabling me to install a cost system in a plant having somewhat unusual problems. It also helped me to get my B.C.S. degree from a resident commercial school and in preparing for the C.P.A. examination. My salary was $112 a month when I enrolled. It is now $400 a month, with a generous allowance for traveling expenses."

That's a true story of what spare-time study has done for just one man. There are thousands of others. Why don't *you* take up a home-study course with the International Correspondence Schools and prepare yourself to earn more money? You can do it if you really try.

It doesn't cost you a penny or obligate you in any way to mark and mail the coupon, but that one simple step will bring you information that will help you to get out of the rut and make good in a big way.

Write Today for Free Booklet

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2019-F, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X in the list below:

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Architect
☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Building Foreman
☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Structural Draftsman
☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Electrical Engineer
☐ Electrical Contractor
☐ Electric Wiring
☐ Electric Lighting
☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
☐ Telegraph Engineer
☐ Telephone Work
☐ Mechanical Engineer
☐ Mechanical Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice
☐ Toolmaker
☐ Patternmaker
☐ Civil Engineer
☐ Surveying and Mapping
☐ Bridge Engineer
☐ Gas Engine Operating
☐ Automobile Mechanic
☐ Aviation Engines
☐ Plumber and Steam Fitter
☐ Plumbing Inspector
☐ Foreman Plumber
☐ Heating and Ventilation
☐ Sheet-Metal Worker
☐ Steam Engineer
☐ Marine Engineer
☐ Refrigeration Engineer
☐ R. R. Positions
☐ Highway Engineer
☐ Chemistry
☐ Pharmacy
☐ Coal Mining Engineer
☐ Navigation ☐ Assayer
☐ Iron and Steel Worker
☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
☐ Cotton Manufacturing
☐ Woolen Manufacturing
☐ Agriculture ☐ Fruit Growing
☐ Poultry Farming
☐ Mathematics ☐ Radio

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management
☐ Industrial Management
☐ Personnel Management
☐ Traffic Management
☐ Accounting and
C. P. A. Coaching
☐ Cost Accounting
☐ Bookkeeping
☐ Secretarial Work
☐ Spanish ☐ French
☐ Salesmanship
☐ Advertising
☐ Business Correspondence
☐ Show Card and Sign Lettering
☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ English
☐ Civil Service
☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Mail Carrier
☐ Grade School Subjects
☐ High School Subjects
☐ Cartooning
☐ Illustrating
☐ Lumber Dealer

Name..
Address..
City..............................State..............................
Occupation..

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

Announcement!

After the October 1929 issue, on sale September 20, the name of

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

will be changed to

ALL-STORY

New price—20c a copy.
Issued every other Saturday.
On sale Wednesday preceding issue date.
First issue October 5th.
On sale October 2nd.

ALL-STORY

"The Best Fiction by the Best Writers"

A new magazine of

Love Stories

of the American Girl in every land

published by

The Frank A. Munsey Company

New York, N. Y.

First Issue on Sale October 2nd

Mediterranean

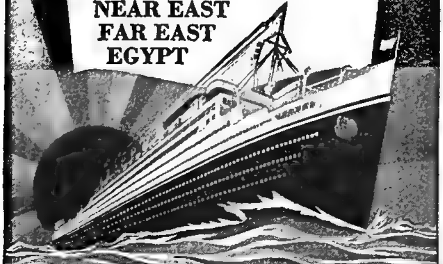
"The Luxury Ships"

M. V. SATURNIA
M. V. VULCANIA

Sail Regularly to
CANNES • NAPLES • TRIESTE

also PRESIDENTE WILSON

From Italy the Fleet of
LLOYD TRIESTINO
Offers a Splendid Service to
NEAR EAST
FAR EAST
EGYPT



COSULICH LINE PHELPS BROTHERS & CO., GENERAL AGENTS 17 BATTERY PLACE, N.Y.C.

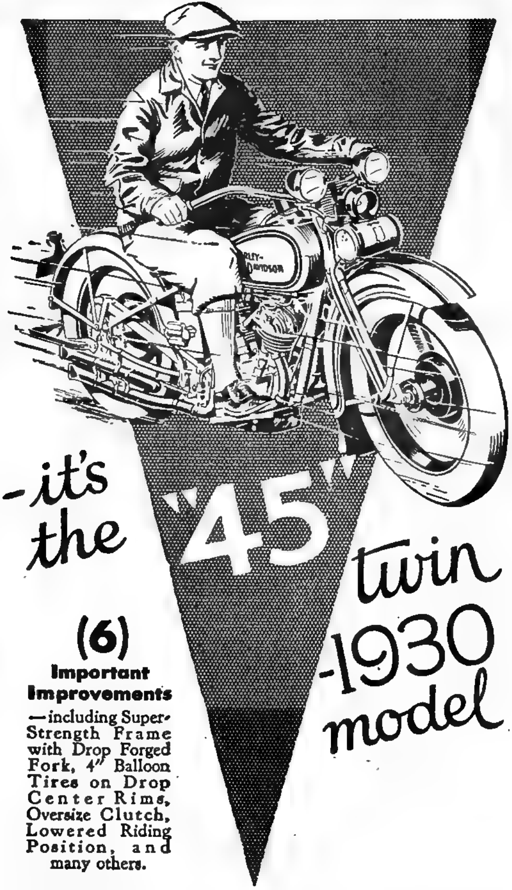
Relieve
PILES
without operation ...

Many report being completely cured of itching, bleeding piles without a surgical operation. Just using UNGUENTINE RECTAL CONES, which doctors everywhere indorse, gives quick relief, checks dreadful bleeding. At all druggists, 75¢. Write for FREE trial. Where a laxative is needed, use NOROL-AGAR, too. It is an effective lubricant, so gentle doctors even prescribe it for children. The Norwich Pharmacal Company, Dept. AE-10, Norwich, N. Y.

Free **Mailing Lists**

Will help you increase sales
Send for FREE catalog giving counts and prices on thousands of classified names of your best prospective customers--National, State and Local--Individuals, Professions, Business Concerns.
99% Guaranteed by refund of 5¢ each
ROSS-Gould Co. 313 N. 10th St. St. Louis

WONDERFUL SPORT!



-it's the "45" twin -1930 model

(6) Important Improvements
—including Super-Strength Frame with Drop Forged Fork, 4" Balloon Tires on Drop Center Rims, Oversize Clutch, Lowered Riding Position, and many others.

SWING into the comfortable saddle of this motorcycle—let its quiet, powerful motor whisk you over hills and down beckoning roads—feel its eager response to throttle and brakes, the perfect balance of its low riding position, the restful comfort of its springing and its big, 4-inch balloon tires. What a motorcycle!

You enjoy motorcycling at its best with this latest "45" Twin. Wonderful performance. Amazing economy—costs barely 2¢ per mile!

See the 1930 models at your local dealer's.
Ask about his Pay-As-You-Ride Plan.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON

Mail this Coupon — for literature showing all our 1930 models, Singles, Twins, and Sidecars.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO.
Dept. M.G., Milwaukee, Wis.

Interested in your motorcycles. Send literature.

Name...
Address..
My age is ☐ 12-15 years ☐ 16-19 years ☐ 20-30 years ☐ 31 years and up. Check your age group.

Some like them hot

7 A.M.

Hate to blink your eyes open in the morning? Then jump into a coolish tub. And if you aren't wide awake at the first rousing splash, Ivory Soap doesn't float!

6 P.M.

Played out at the end of the day, when there's a full evening ahead? Then pretend for five moments that your tub is a soft bed. Bring a sparkle back to your skin with a frosting of Ivory foam.

11 P.M.

Is your mind a merry-go-round when you should be sound asleep? Then drift in the still, gentle warmth of an Ivory bath . . . till dreams mount to your head and your eyelids droop like tired wings . . .

Yes, some like their baths hot and some like them cold. But the choice of about fifty millions of Americans proves that whatever the water's mood, Ivory must be on its top. For isn't Ivory so gentle and pure that it's the world's champion baby soap? That is why an Ivory bath gives smoothness and comfort to the most sensitive, luxury-loving skin. Every day the great white fleet of Ivory boats floats on toward new ports of content!

. . . kind to everything it touches · $99^{44}/_{100}\%$ Pure · "It floats"

© 1929, P. & G. Co.

Go gle

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

CONTENTS

1929
Vol. LXXII No. 2

for October 1st

Anthony M. Rud
EDITOR

The Red Spider's Den . . . . . Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson 2
A Complete Novel of the American Troops in Siberia

The Hand Of Piperock Providence W. C. Tuttle 52
A Humorous Tale of the West

The Practise Run (*A Poem*) . . Harry Kemp 64

High Explosive . . . . Larry Barretto 65
A Story of War Ridden Belgium

The Invisible Guns Of Kabul . . Talbot Mundy 76
Beginning a Stirring Novel of the Khyber Pass

No Holds Barred . . . . . . Allan Vaughan Elston 105
The Story of a Crime and a Crimson Stain

A Duel Of Giants . . . . . . Henry G. Lamond 116
An Unusual Tale of the Kangaroos

The Talking Drums . . . . T. Samson Miller 121

Men To Match . . . . Robert Carse 122
A Story of the Mountain Climbers

Hu Chua . . . . Ralph R. Perry 136
A Story of the Chinese Rivers

Off Shore . . . . Georges Surdez 146
A Story of a Submarine Encounter

The Outrider . . . . Harold Lamb 154
Concluding a Two-Part Novel of the Khan of the Krim

The Camp-Fire 182 Ask Adventure 187 Trail Ahead 192

Cover Design by Hubert Rogers *Headings by Hubert Rogers*

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y., U. S. A. Joseph A. Moore, Chairman of the Board; S. R. Latshaw, President; B. C. Dunklin, Secretary; Fred Lewis, Treasurer; Anthony M. Rud, Editor. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance. Single copy, Twenty-five Cents, in Canada Thirty Cents. Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian postage, 75 cents. Trade Mark Registered; Copyright, 1929, by The Butterick Publishing Company in the United States and Great Britain.

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

THE RED SPIDER'S DEN

A Complete Novel of the American Troops in Siberia

CHAPTER I

A NOT SO GREEN RECRUIT

IT WAS Sergeant Doyle who put the case very briefly.

"What in the name of all that's holy is the sense of our guardin' the mines against the Bolsheviki when every whiskered son of a gun and his brother in Siberia is a Bolshie, lookin' to leap careless-like on our necks every time we turn our backs?"

Sergeant Doyle was weatherbeaten with much Texas wind and Philippine sun. His words carried weight with this platoon of doughboys guarding a little station on a branch line of the Trans-Siberian railway, two days' travel from Vladivostok.

"And this Bolshie boss who they call the Red Spider— That's a nice pickle for American troops to be in, two of our men killed already by his pot hunters, three wounded and us never knowin' when he's goin' to land on us next. And this last stunt, kidnappin' an American officer! And what do we do? Do we go out and clean up on him? We do *not!* I tell you, the damn' war up and ruined this man's Army and I don't mean maybe."

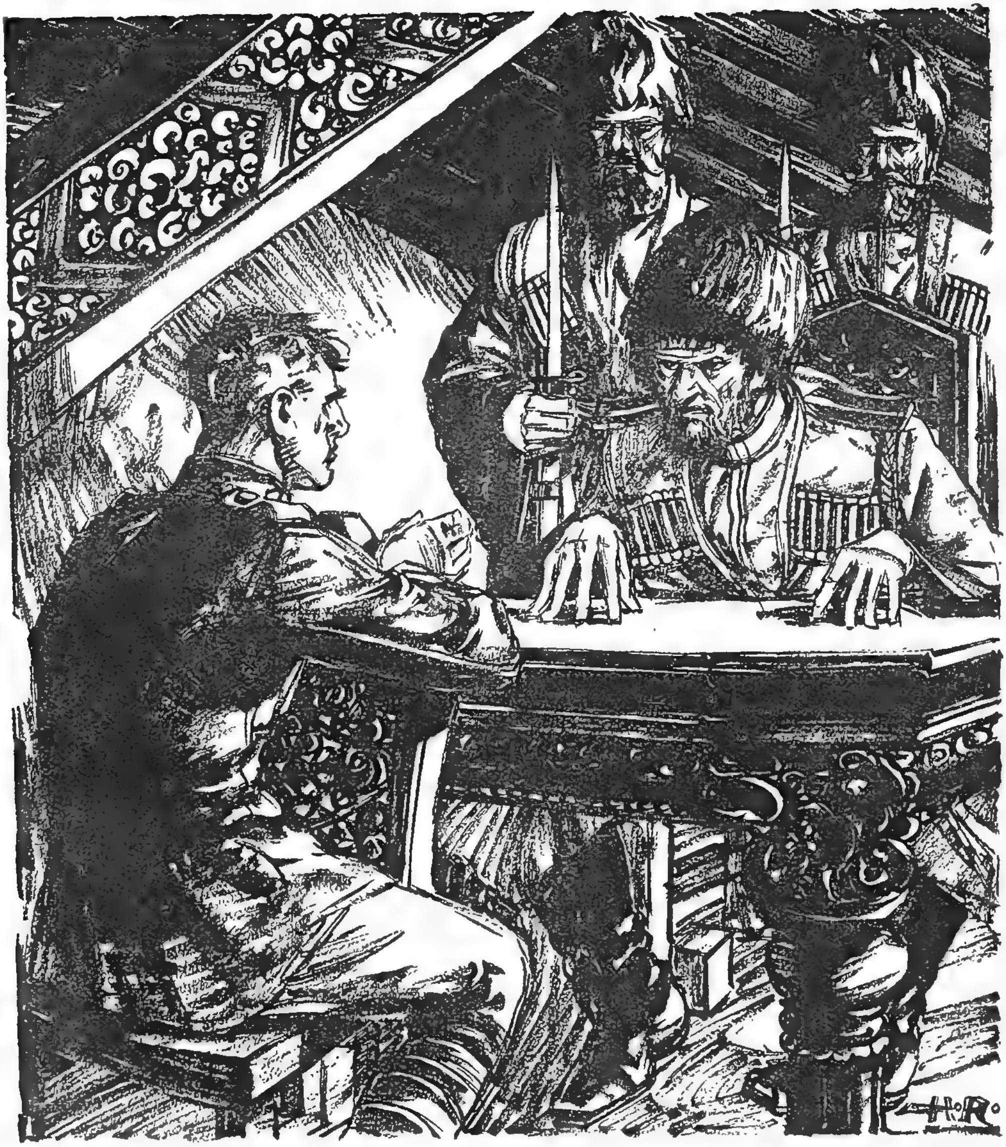
As Doyle looked down the one street of the village, bordered by low roofed log houses and dominated by the inevitable blue and gold domed Russian church, his frosty blue eye spied a figure entering the cabin at the far end.

"Look at that guy Michaeloff. There he goes, grinnin' like a Cheshire cat, moochin' around our quarters by day and raisin' hell with his Bolshie friends at night. I've seen his like afore now—*gu-gu amigos, muy amigo* in the daytime when you're set for them, bowin' and scrapin'; but ready when your back was turned to slice you up with a bolo or plug you full o' rusty nails from a muzzle loadin' gun. I've saw some soldierin' in my time and, take it from me, there ain't nothin' worse than monkey piddlin' around with these here hostile populations who don't wear any uniform and keep a gun hid in the hay stack."

It was a long speech for Doyle and his hearers gave ear respectfully.

"They suah got a powahful lotta haystacks about heah," commented Travers mildly, as he scratched his ear. Travers, being somewhat of an old-timer himself, felt it incumbent upon him to speak up.

"You said it, bo!" Doyle waved his pipe to punctuate his points. "Here we are sittin' on our tails in this gawdforsaken neck o' the woods, pickin' up our feet and puttin' 'em down again without a friend in the world exceptin' ourselves, and the States so far away it hurts to think about it. And unless I miss my guess, we are about due to get jumped on



good and plenty by this here Red Spider and his Bolshie thugs."

"You really think that, Sarge?" the awe stricken voice of little freckle faced Timmons spoke up.

Doyle vouchsafed no reply but a grunt.

"Here's one gang o' Cossacks, Brodensky's men, sittin' camped near us. Here's the Bolshies all around us and movin' in and out o' camp whenever it pleases 'em. And here's another gang o' Cossacks, Kargadoff's outfit, sittin' on the other side. And they're all different outfits, all fightin' each other. They only got one thing in common, in addition to their dirt, and that is, that they don't like anything that smells United States."

"Yeah, they suah are unanimous in theah detestation of our noble country," said Travers softly.

"Yep, take it from me, them babies is all goin' to combine here one of these frosty nights and plug us full o' lead."

The silence following this remark was broken by Timmons.

"And this ninety day wonder we got for skipper ain't doin' anything about it?"

A disapproving silence greeted this. No man with less than a year's service has the right to criticize his commanding officer so crudely.

"Yep," Doyle went on reflectively, "there's nigh on to one hundred o' them Ussuri Cossacks of Kargadoff's, another two hundred o' them Semionoff Cossacks of Brodensky's, and anywhere from five hundred to a thousand Bolshies all around us. Way I figger it out, we're all set to be the late lamented in a sure enough Custer's last fight. We bein' all of forty men or so, includin' them recruits that blowed in today."

"A lousy lookin' lot," remarked Timmons sententiously.

"You wahn't so blame sanitary lookin' yo'self when you blew in," observed Travers quietly. "And you suah sound as foolish now as you did then."

Timmons took this rebuke in silence. Then, when attention was attracted elsewhere, he quietly betook himself away, strolling down the camp to where several men were busy straightening out their equipment. The new recruits were clothed for the most part in baggy olive drab, the breeches hanging in great folds down over the knees, the collars of their blouses sagging loosely, their sleeves too long or too short and their puttees rolled in weird fashion. Spying them rapidly healed Timmons' recently bruised feelings with the pleasant sensation of superiority that came over him.

THE RECRUIT nearest him had his back turned and was bending over, fastening a puttee wrapping.

"Hi, rook, where you hail from?" Timmons' voice was loud and cheerful and a little condescending.

The man before him straightened and turned.

The easy assured manner suddenly fell away from Timmons like an ill fitting cloak.

The stranger, when stretched out to his full length, was tall and exceedingly capable looking. A well cut blouse—no quartermaster issue, that blouse—fitted snugly over the broad shoulders, powerful chest and lean waist. His breeches flared slightly from slim hips and fitted properly under the knee. His puttees were rolled flawlessly.

All this Timmons felt rather than saw, being slightly perturbed at the stranger's eyes. Gray-green they were, quiet and wide apart, their laziness belied by the quickness with which they could freeze into sudden chill intensity. And it was this chilly, intent gaze which bored through Timmons now and made him squirm, he knew not why.

"What's that you say?" asked the stranger.

"I said—I asked—" stuttered Timmons—"where you hailed from."

The tall stranger digested this in silence, looking at and through Timmons the while.

"Who wants to know?" he asked after a while.

"Why, me. I jest asked kinda . . ." And Timmons' voice trailed off uncertainly.

The stranger continued to regard him, something remote and uncomfortably impersonal about his gaze so that Timmons' eyes wavered in spite of himself.

And then the newcomer smiled. And the smile transformed the stranger's face marvelously; it left Timmons warmed and cheered, although still somewhat humble, all his cockiness vanished into thin air.

An authoritative voice called from farther up the company street—the voice of Sergeant Doyle—

"Recruits, fall in for inspection!"

The scattered rookies hurriedly seized rifles and belts and milled about uncertainly, each waiting upon the other to make the first move in compliance with the order. The tall new man, however, wasted no time. With one swift movement he had put on belt and bayonet; quickly he swept up his rifle, snapped open the breech, examined it, and then moved out to the edge of the road where he stood quietly at order arms.

The recruits, taking comfort from the assurance of his manner, fell in on the left of him, craning their necks out of ill fitting collars, for all the world like a bunch of curious geese. Striding down toward the formation came Sergeant Doyle, followed at a few paces by Travers.

It was Travers who stopped, as though shot, in front of the tall newcomer.

"By George!" he cried. "If it ain't—" Whatever he had started to say died on his lips.

The newcomer, seemingly without moving a muscle of his face, had closed one eye in unmistakable warning.

"If that guy's a recruit, I'll eat my hat," asserted Timmons, as they sat near the fire in the Russian log hut used for a canteen.

Travers looked at him reflectively.

"Wouldn't be a bad idea a-tall for you to eat yo' hat. Reckon it might keep you from chewin' the fat so all fired much."

"Is that so?" Timmons responded, heavily sarcastic.

"What name does this guy call hisself by, anyways?" The voice came from the other side of the fire.

"Murray," answered some one.

"H'm, that's as good as anything," grunted Sergeant Doyle, "but be that as it may, he's a pretty snappy soldier."

TRAVERS raised his head and started to say something, then checked himself. Very quietly then he rose and made his way out, and walked down the company street to where a half log and half canvas shack sheltered the recently arrived recruits. The place was deserted except for one cot on which, stretched out at full length, his arms under his head, lay the tall soldier who called himself Murray.

As Travers entered, Murray grinned a welcome.

"About time you came drifting in to see me, you old horsethief," he greeted, and waved Travers to a seat on a trunk locker.

"What the heck are you aimin' to pull anyway, Dick?" inquired Travers.

"Nothing at all, nothing at all. Just sort of got to hankering after the whiff of bean soup."

"Well, you suah as hell picked a fine place to gratify yo' low instincts. Do you know who's commandin' this here regiment?"

"No," admitted Murray lazily.

"Old Bellerin' Bill Banton, hisself."

"The hell you say!"

Murray cocked a surprised eye at him, then shook his head and laughed.

"If that doesn't beat four of a kind. Suppose he'll remember me?"

"'Tain't very likely he's goin' to fergit you, seein' as how he was presidin' at the co't-ma'tial which bobtailed you. How come you ramble out in this heah neck o' the woods anyhow?" Travers looked at his friend curiously.

"Just as I told you. Everybody was getting into uniform and I sort of hankered after the smell of bean soup once more. The sergeant at recruit barracks was an old-timer I used to know and he asks me if I'd like to go to France or would I like to join these replacements going to Siberia. So I took Siberia."

"What in tarnation did you wanta come to this heah lousy jumpin' off place for?" Travers was honestly surprised.

Murray raised himself on one elbow. His eyes were grim.

"I'll tell you. You were talking about the court-martial that bobtailed me. Remember that lying son of a gun who was principal witness against me? Fellow out of B Troop—afterwards went over the hill?"

"A kind of a wop named Gravnitz?"

"Yeah—a Russian. I heard he'd returned over here. And I surely would like to catch up with that baby." Murray sighed and relaxed again. "You know, I was going up for my exams as second looie when he pulled the stuff that got me a dishonorable discharge and busted up my young life. Yeah, I'd like to have about five minutes alone with that bird."

Murray stared at the roof, his jaw set in harsh lines, his eyes gleaming in a fashion that boded no good to one Gravnitz should the two ever come together.

"Shucks, we all knew you didn't have no bobtail comin' to you by rights or nothin' else, but here you are with a yellow slip against you and re-uppin' under a assumed name. And the president of the co't that give you the kick is commandin' this heah regiment. I did heah some talk o' his bein' promoted to brigadiah-general, but it makes no difference. If he gets wind o' you re-uppin' unduh an assumed name it'll mean ten yeahs at Alcatraz or Leavenwohth, makin' little rocks outa big ones. You suah was powahful foolish to run yo' neck in a noose like that."

"Does Bellerin' Bill get out here often?"

"Not on yo' tintype he don't. That old cuss suah has his shoes nailed to Vladivostok. Now it's comin' spring and a little wa'muh, he might come pokin' his nose around."

"Whatever come of that long legged kid of his?"

"I don't know; heah he went to West Point but ain't heard nothin' since."

"He was a nice kid."

"Yeh, nice young fellah."

"The old man was sure crazy about him. Yes—" Murray continued after a silence—"he was sure crazy about that kid." He stared up at the roof, silent and thoughtful. "Who's the moon faced lad commanding this platoon?" he asked suddenly.

"Name's Perkins. Lieutenant I. C. Perkins," said Travers shortly. "And his initials suah fit.* He's suah hell on the propeh respect due an officer."

"Any good in a scrap?"

"Dunno. All we've done has been sittin' around on our tails. Me, I think there's trouble goin' to blow up soon—sooner than Perkins figgers. These heah Cossacks and Bolshies hereabouts are all set to raise hell with us."

"Yeah?" Murray yawned. "Anything to drink around this neck o' the woods?"

"Shot o' vodka onct in a while, if you know where to get it."

Murray raised himself on his elbow and looked at his companion narrowly.

"Yeh," he said, "trust you to know where to get it," and sank back.

Late that afternoon the recruit who was not a recruit strolled through the camp, his hands in his pockets, a studious frown on his face. A querulous voice, from somewhere to one side, brought his head up quickly.

"Look here, my man, don't you know enough to pay proper respect to an officer?"

Looking in the direction of the voice, Murray spied a small round man, his fat knees so close together as almost to make him seem knock-kneed, his pudgy figure stiffly erect, his blue eyes staring angrily out of a red, rather pimply face. His shoes were unpolished, and his puttees were such as soldiers wear. He was dressed in issue breeches and an olive drab shirt like the soldiers. Studying him closely, Murray made out a tarnished silver bar pinned on the collar of his shirt.

"I beg your pardon," said the soldier quietly. "I didn't see you, sir." And drawing himself up, Murray saluted.

The lieutenant approached and, standing before the recruit, peered up at him through myopic eyes.

"I see," the querulous voice went on, "that you don't even know how to address an officer. The proper reply should have been, 'I beg the Lieutenant's pardon. I didn't see the Lieutenant.' "

Something like a grin flickered for a second on Murray's face before he quickly erased it.

"Yes, sir," he replied quietly. "Private, First Class, Murray begs the Lieutenant's pardon. Private Murray did not see the Lieutenant."

---

*These two letters, signifying Inspected and Condemned, are branded on an Army horse or mule after its uselessness to the Government has been proved beyond a shadow of a doubt.

THE LITTLE officer peered at him suspiciously. He had detected that suggestion of a grin, and he had more than a suspicion that the soldier had corrected him by giving the full and complete answer. But there was something self-contained and strong about this soldier, something exceedingly capable and fit. Those wide spaced, gray-green eyes bored into a man and made him feel his smallness and his meanness. And naturally the lieutenant was irritated.

"Well, keep your eyes about you next time," he snorted. "And remember the respect due an officer. I don't want to have to speak to you about it again. Do you understand?"

"Private, First Class, Murray understands the Lieutenant," the soldier returned gravely.

And again, Perkins, the little lieutenant, felt himself hot under the collar; felt that he was being laughed at secretly by this tall man before him. But there was nothing to be done about it. With a disgusted snort he turned on his heel and strode away, his fat back and round shoulders stiff with dignity.

Travers came up, an inquiring look in his eyes.

"Seen old I.C. givin' you a dressin' down. How come?"

"Damfino. Every time I meet a little, fat, pudgy officer like that, I get in wrong with him."

"Yeah, and seein' a long, easy goin' drink o' water like you makes 'em froth at the mouth. I know 'em," Travers finished sagely.

"Yeah, perhaps," said Murray absently. Then, brightening, "But how about that drink you promised me?"

"Suah—c'mon." And Travers led the way down the long street of the village.

At the far end of the street they saw a flash of steel and heard the trample of horses' hoofs. Rounding the last log hut near the church, there trotted a squad of Cossacks, gay in blue and gold, looking very snappy as they sat their shaggy mounts, their fur *kubankas* worn at a rakish angle, their long lances fluttering with bright green and red pennons. With a musical clink and clash of bits and spurs they came to a halt before a square built, log hewn peasant's cabin, which stood a little back from the road. Tethering their horses, the Cossacks, some seven or eight men, stamped noisily into the house, their spurs and dagger chains jingling as they walked.

Travers shook his head and came to a halt.

"Not so good," he said. "Them Cossacks has suah beat us to it. That's the joint wheah we get the drinks."

"Yeah? What of it?" Murray was impatient.

"Them babies will pick a fight with us suah as shootin' if we mosey in theah."

"T'hell with them." Murray strode ahead. "I'm willing to take on the whole Cossack army for the sake of a drink. C'mon." And he led the way.

Travers followed, shaking his head dubiously.

The room which they entered was quite large. At one end was the inevitable Russian oven, used variously for cooking, baking and for heating the place and, on cold nights, as a bed for the entire family.

There was one long table extending down the side of the room with two wooden benches built into it. Upon these were seated the Cossacks, drinking and munching *tchorni kleb*, the ubiquitous Russian black bread.

The Cossacks looked up, frowning as the two Americans entered, then spoke to each other in low, guttural voices, glancing sidewise at the newcomers. The proprietor of the place, a bent old *muzhik*, his feet swathed in rags, came bowing to the two soldiers, rubbing his hands and watching the Cossacks uneasily. There were two places at the end of the table and the Americans seated themselves. Travers said something in Russian to the proprietor and the old man brought out two tin cups and set them on the table. Then, rubbing his hands nervously again, he reached for a large black bottle which stood in front of the Cossacks.

One of them, a huge, square shouldered fellow with long, fierce looking mustaches, struck the old man's arm.

"*Nyet!*" he growled, saying something under his breath about the "Amerikanski".

Murray watched the scene quietly. Travers looked worried. The old man returned, shaking his head, a placating smile on his face.

"Does he mean to say we aren't going to have a drink on account of that whiskered pup there?" asked Murray, and his eyes chilled.

Travers nodded.

"Is that so?"

Murray arose, catlike, and with one swift stride was behind the tall Cossack. Reaching forward, he seized the ends of the enormous mustaches and, using them as a handle, jerked the fellow backward on to the floor. Then, disregarding the indignant fallen one, who was shouting and cursing, disregarding the other Cossacks who half rose menacingly, their hands grasping their swords, he took the bottle and, carrying it to Travers, calmly poured out drinks for the two of them. Taking his own tin cup he gulped down the fiery, colorless vodka.

"Wow-eeee-ee-ee!" he breathed. "That stuff is high explosive and no mistake!"

Turning then, as if aware for the first time of the excitement in his rear, he stared curiously at the angry Russians behind him. Some of them were still seated, but a few had partly risen. The man whom he had overturned had struggled to his feet and was tugging at his saber, growling the while. His friends were encouraging him. They were all talking sixty to the minute.

At sight of the man advancing on him with the saber, Murray laughed. Motioning Travers to follow suit, he rose from the table. Then, carefully raising the bottle and the tin cups, he placed them on the floor and poured the remaining liquor in the bottle into the cups. The tall Cossack was now close upon the two Americans. Murray flung the empty bottle at the Russian. It struck the man full on the forehead and dropped him. His friends started to rise again when, turning swiftly, Murray half crouched and placed his shoulder under the table edge. Rising, he brought the table up with him and flung it over.

There was a wild tangle of table, benches and Cossacks and a shouting fit to wake the dead. Turning to Travers, Murray jerked his head toward the scrambled Russians and, with an amused grin, took the unconscious Cossack by one leg and one arm, gave a heave and flung him out the open door. Travers entered into the spirit of the thing, laughing, and the two of them successively sorted out the wild tangle of Cossacks, mixed up with the table, and threw one man after another out the door until finally the room was cleared.

"Now," said Murray gently, as he righted the table and replaced the glasses and bottle, "perhaps we can enjoy a drink in peace!"

CHAPTER II

STRANGE NEWS

"HERE, old-timer—" Murray pointed to the empty bottle—"a little more bug juice, *pronto*."

The old *muzhik*, looking fearfully over his shoulder at the door, outside of which could be heard the excited voices of the Cossacks, took the empty bottle and disappeared, only to return in a moment with it filled.

The voices beyond the door increased in volume. Murray paused in his refilling of the two tin cups and listened a space.

"Have to be real rude with those boys if they don't quiet down," he said regretfully. Then, lifting his cup, "Here's looking at you." And he downed the fiery stuff.

But Travers grew worried as the clamor outside showed no signs of abating.

"'Pears like we got a real suah enough scrap on our hands," he said, but neglected his drink not a bit on account of his concern. "Another shot o' that giggle gargle and I'll go and wipe their noses fo' 'em all by myself. Never see such fellahs fo' kickin' up a rumpus."

His voice was aggrieved, and his eye gently reflective. Murray saw it and grinned to himself, knowing that gentle reflection was generally a prelude to violent action by the usually mild mannered Travers.

The old *muzhik* went to the door after a particularly violent outburst and spoke with some one outside. Soon he returned, followed by one of the Cossacks. This fellow, a slim young man with a blond mustache, advanced to Murray, clicked his heels together and bowed formally, saying something in Russian.

"What's it all about, Travers?" asked Murray easily.

Travers listened intently, asking a question or two after the man finished his speech.

"This bozo says as how his friend, the rough baby with the whiskuhs, wants to fight a dool with you, pistols or swo'ds or anything you want. He says his friend's honah is offended and only blood will wipe out the stain."

"Sure—" Murray waved a careless hand, then, rising, hitched his belt a notch tighter—"lead me to him." He carried his tin cup with him.

The young Cossack obligingly led the way. Murray stalked after him, followed by Travers, still gentle and reflective. The procession was trailed by the timorous landlord whose curiosity overmastered his fear.

The Cossacks were formed in a half circle outside the door. The tall one with the huge mustache drew himself up stiffly and glared as the Americans appeared.

"It's duels they want, eh?" Murray asked.

He reached into his blouse and almost before the watchers knew what it was all about, a blued steel revolver had leaped to his hand. With his left hand he threw his tin cup into the air. There were two sharp cracks, the tin cup leaped wildly once, twice, in its downward progress and then hit the earth. As quickly as the revolver had appeared did it disappear.

The Cossacks stared, open mouthed. One of them picked up the perforated cup and passed it around. The others marveled as they touched the torn metal and gazed at the American, vast respect written in their faces.

The square shouldered Cossack lost his belligerent air with magic suddenness.

"I'm ready to fight a duel any time his Nibs wants to get going," said Murray.

The Cossacks shook their heads when the remark was translated by Travers. They spoke together in low tones. Finally the young fellow with the blond mustache who had been spokesman went into another long speech in Russian. As he spoke his friends nodded violently and began to smile. At the end of his speech several of them burst out with a loud cheer.

"This guy says let's let bygones be bygones and have a drink. At least as near as I can figger, that's what they mean."

And Travers turned to them, making the motion of one raising a drink to his lips. They shouted in approval.

"Sure," agreed Murray. "That's the first sensible word they've spoken so far."

Turning, he waved the Cossacks to follow, and they piled in after the two Americans. Once inside each and every one, grinning in friendly fashion, came up and shook hands with Murray and Travers, the last being the tall desperado with the whiskers who made what sounded like a handsome apology in Russian and bowed deeply.

THE BOTTLE was called into service once again and the landlord, immensely relieved at the bloodless end of the affray, hustled about at high speed replenishing cups.

Suddenly the Cossacks, tin cups in hand, heaved themselves to their feet and shouted:

"*Vashi darovia! Vashi darovia Amerikanski!*" And they drank down their vodka, putting the cups bottom up on the table to show that not a drop remained.

"These birds get more and more human every minute," nodded Murray approvingly, raising his cup in turn. He boomed out a deep voiced—"How!" And his empty cup went on to the table.

The blond mustached Cossack spoke up in English.

"Your friend, he iss Amerikanski cowboy?" he asked.

"Suah as shootin'," responded Travers, without the flicker of an eyelid. "Why, that boy is a son of old Buffalo Bill hisself!"

Now it happens that the exploits of Buffalo Bill have been translated into every European language, and his name is almost a household word.

The Cossack spoke to his companions.

"Boofalo Beel!"

The Russians looked at Murray with renewed respect. Not knowing what it was all about, he grinned cheerfully but a little absently at the group around the table, and returned to sipping his vodka. Finally Murray leaned forward and spoke to Travers.

"Ask what's all this stuff about this shavetail being kidnapped by the Bolshies," Murray said.

Travers obliged and there was an immediate outpouring of excited Russian from all seven of the Cossacks at once. When the clamor had subsided a little, Travers managed to piece together a word here and a phrase there and by dint of much questioning, got at the information he was seeking.

"These guysh, no—" he shook his head and tried to untangle his tongue—"theesh guysh shay that the looie is suah enough capshured." He sat back, evidently well pleased with himself.

"Yeah? It took all that talk to find out something you already knew? Now you'd better ask them what month is the Fourth of July, or something else hard to get at." Murray's voice was drawling, but Travers caught the sarcasm.

Again he questioned the Cossacks, and another barrage of Russian fell on him.

He looked helplessly at Murray.

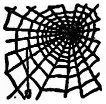
"These guysh are the besh single handed, double action, long winded gab artists I evah shee," he complained.

"Find out where he's being held," ordered Murray.

After ten minutes of talk Travers nodded, and held up his hand for silence.

"Come out of it, you dope," Murray snorted. "Find out where the shavetail is."

"He ish five miles away. Les'sh go get 'im."



TO MURRAY the project seemed not at all unreasonable. After the eighth vodka any sort of project seems feasible. But as yet it was merely a thing to talk about, one of those subjects to play with while good drinks were warming a man up and making him forget his troubles.

"Who's the lad that's captured him anyway?" asked Murray.

There was another barrage of words out of which came the information that it was the Red Spider.

"Red Spider?" Murray was mildly interested. "Who's he?"

"That guy'sh head of all the Bolshies in these pa'ts. Bad medishine, very bad medishine." Travers wagged a solemn head.

"What sort of a guy is he and how come he has this name of Red Spider?"

Murray sipped his vodka reflectively, knowing full well that he was precipitating another wild hurricane of words. By this time he had learned patience, however, and waited for the information to come, piecemeal, out of the chaos of talk.

It seemed that one of the Cossacks had heard that he had acquired his name because he had a trick of appearing to walk sidewise; and he was thin and gangling, with abnormally long fingers, somewhat reminiscent of the legs of a spider.

Murray took another vodka, nodding his head the while.

"Les'sh go get this guy and reshcue second looie," suggested Travers.

And he suddenly found Murray in hearty agreement, ready to put the project into instant execution.

"Sure—" he rose— "we'll go get him. How about asking our friends here to get us a couple o' horses and come along."

Travers looked at him admiringly.

"You are suah a ha'd guy to beat. Suah gotta hand it to you—drunksh you are, thinkin' up a sh-sh-scheme like that!"

He turned to the Cossacks. Being habituated to vodka, they took the matter more seriously, and a big discussion started.

"Another drink all around," ordered Murray.

And again the tin cups were raised and emptied at a single draught. This decided them.

"Suah they'll come, but they shay losh Bolshies theah, maybe we'll get hell shot outa ush. They shay thish guy Michaeloff knows moah about it than he'll tell." As he spoke two of the Cossacks staggered out. "They're goin' to get coupla gee-gees."

The rest of the Russians talked at the top of their voices, all arguing at once, hands and arms waving until it seemed as though the roof must lift with the volume of the noise and excitement.

The door opened quietly. A Cossack near the entrance shouted a word. Suddenly the noise stilled itself as though a blanket had dropped over them all. Looking up curiously, Murray saw a dark skinned, black eyed Russian in *muzhik* dress, standing in the doorway—a handsome, crafty looking man.

"Michaeloff!" he heard a voice beside him snort angrily, and saw the Cossacks reach for their swords.

So this was Michaeloff, the Bolsheviki, the alleged spy, the man who was suspected of knowing more than he would tell of the disappearance of the second lieutenant? Murray looked at him long and carefully while the Cossacks stirred and muttered uneasily about him.

"Yes, suh, that theah's the triple dishtilled shon o' shin." Travers hiccupped, then drew himself up with drunken solemnity, holding on to the table with both hands as he glared belligerently at the newcomer.

The old *muzhik* proprietor of the place became worried again, for the growls that went up from the Cossacks certainly boded no good for the man who had just entered, nor anything like a guarantee of a peaceful evening.

The wave of hostility which swept toward him from that crowded room struck the new arrival with the full force of its intensity. He paused within the doorway and looked over the room, his black eyebrows drawing down and his hand dropping toward his right side.

"No you don't!" Murray's voice rasped out like a whipsaw. "Put 'em up!"

And the new arrival was suddenly blinking at the small round muzzle of a revolver which had appeared as though suddenly picked from the air itself.

* * *

THE HAND of the man at the door left his side and up went both hands, while his eyebrows arched themselves comically in surprise.

"*Chorashaw*—good!" growled several of the Cossacks.

Two of them rose swiftly and bore down on the intruder, one of them skilfully frisking him, an action which produced a small pearl-handled revolver which the Cossack promptly confiscated. Leading the disarmed man forward, they brought him before Murray who had watched the proceedings with indifferent eyes. Tacitly and without any argument all men there had yielded leadership to this tall, loose jointed but fearfully efficient American.

"You speak English?"

Murray shot the question at the man with the suddenness of a sword thrust. Michaeloff shook his head in denial. But preceding the motion there had been a telltale flicker of the eyes, a flicker that Murray noted and seized upon.

"You're lying," he remarked easily, "and I'm going to prove it to you." He leaned forward and bored into the eyes of the man standing in front of him. "In five seconds, by the clock," he said quietly, "I'm going to put a bullet hole through your right shoulder." He glanced down at the watch he wore on his wrist.

The Russian went pale.

"Is it sporting proposeetion," he asked, "to shoot an unarmed man?" Beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead as he watched Murray like a cornered rat.

"I knew it," nodded Murray. "No, I won't shoot you in five seconds, but I will shoot you the second you try to lie to me again. Where is this American officer being held?"

"I do not—" the Russian started to say, then swiftly changed his mind at the deadly light which appeared like a sudden cold flame in the eyes of his questioner. "He is out there," waving his hand vaguely behind him.

"So's the North Pole and the Southern Cross out there," rapped out Murray. "Answer my question."

"He's at the den of the Red Spider," answered the Russian shortly.

The blond mustached Russian repeated the words and made a remark in his own language. The Cossacks stared at each other, something akin to horror in their eyes. One of them crossed himself after the Russian fashion.

"What sort of a joint is this den of the Red Spider?" Murray asked Travers.

"I can't give much dope, sheptin' that this den of the Red Spider suah enough ain't no health reso't."

Murray turned to Michaeloff again.

"Is the officer alive?" he asked.

Michaeloff looked at him queerly.

"Yes," he answered, "and will be until—"

"Until when?" Murray asked quietly.

"Until tomorrow night."

The Cossacks hung breathless on the uncomprehended words of the two men. The dusk of early evening had fallen outside. Overhead an old fashioned oil lamp cast flickering shadows on the strained and intent faces of the Americans in their drab, dun colored uniforms and on the Cossacks in their blue and gold. The old *muzhik* placed another log in the firebox of the stove. The place was silent.

Murray stared long and thoughtfully at the Russian standing before him, and the man grew flushed and uncomfortable under his gaze.

"I see," nodded the American finally, getting slowly to his feet.

"Tell these Cossack birds that we're moving out immediately," he said to Travers. Somehow in spite of the liberal quotations of vodka, Travers managed to get the idea across and there was an immediate bustle and movement.

"You," said Murray to Michaeloff, "will come with us—and God have mercy upon you if you pull any rough stuff. I'll make it my business to kill you deader than a door nail the minute that you show the slightest sign of treachery. Do you understand that?"

There was no misunderstanding it. In Murray's eyes shone a cold light, as passionless and as remorseless as Fate itself. Michaeloff nodded his head, shuffling his feet uncomfortably.

"All right," said Murray, hitching up his belt, "let's be on our way."

The Cossacks waited respectfully while this son of "Boofalo Beel" strode to the door of the room, then followed after, keeping Michaeloff well guarded. Once outside there was some delay as the extra horses were brought up. They were soon forthcoming, small, shaggy, ill kempt looking animals that, nevertheless, could reel off their forty *versts* a day, day after day, and live upon what herbage they could paw up through the snow. Murray, once mounted, seemed to overshadow his horse. His feet nearly reached to the ground as he set forth.

THE LITTLE column moved down the one street of the village for the open road when there was a running and shouting up the line toward where the platoon of American infantry was camped.

It was Timmons, his face red and his manner excited, who chased after them. Murray delayed after hearing his name called. The little soldier raced up and stood panting at his stirrup.

"Sergeant Doyle says wait a minute—he wants to see you."

Murray quieted his horse and looked back. He saw the compact, powerful figure of Sergeant Doyle approaching.

"Let'sh haulsh tailsh outa heah 'fore that hunk o' mishery drags ush back," suggested Travers, glaring balefully at Doyle.

The sergeant was upon them as he spoke. Doyle paid no attention to Travers, but halted in front of Murray and looked up at him speculatively for a little before he spoke.

"What are you guys aimin' to pull off around here?" he asked mildly. "I know you been sittin' in Vodka Joe's all the afternoon. That there firewater he hands out leads to a godawful bunch of court-martials and paper work."

Murray smiled.

"Damned if it isn't pretty rank stuff at that," he agreed, "but the quality of Vodka Joe's booze has nothing to do with this party. If you can fix it up with his royal Highness back at headquarters hut, maybe I can bring home some bacon in the form of one second lieutenant, complete, issue of 1918, fresh out of the box, never been used."

The two men looked at each other understandingly—the perfect understanding of the old-timer, who retains few illusions concerning things as they are in "this man's Army".

"Yeh, I kinda figgered that out," said Doyle, "but looka here, soldier, it ain't back there I'm worryin' about—" he jerked a contemptuous shoulder toward the headquarters hut—"it's these here babies you and Travers is headin' out with so free and easy." Doyle cast a suspicious look at the group of Cossacks who waited patiently while the Americans talked things over. Then, lowering his voice, "And this guy Michaeloff who's travelin' alongside o' you lookin' like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, that guy's bad medicine and I don't mean maybe nor perhaps. He's responsible for about all the rough stuff that's pulled around these parts."

"Yeah—" Murray cast a reflective sidelong glance at Michaeloff, who was edging his pony nearer, the better to hear—"I haven't got a single girlish illusion left about him. But I'll do my little best to fox him. It isn't him I'm worrying about particularly. If you'll sort of square me up with the morning report, I'll head forth and do a little Nick Carter stuff that'll make 'em all sit up."

Doyle grinned and nodded.

"Don't mind about the morning report. I'll keep a fatherly eye on that. But this here Travers—he ain't worth a damn when he's sober, let alone bein' tighter than a tick like he is now."

The remark was not made in any too low a voice. Travers, nodding over the high pommel of the Cossack saddle, suddenly raised his head.

"Go on, casht all as-as-ashpersions you feel a mind to on my lily white character. Don' make no diff'rence to me. But looka here, I suah would like fo' you to remembuh one thing—" And, leaning forward on the pommel of the saddle, Travers mumbled the rest of his sentence, totally oblivious of his listeners. Whatever the one important thing was, no one would ever know.

"You see?" Doyle shrugged his shoulders. "You sure can be figgerin' on playin' a lone hand, because that guy Travers'll be jest a extra weight added to your load. You can't load him into your gun, you can't wear him, and you can't eat him, so what t'hell good is he?"

Travers raised his head again, mumbling, but the two paid no attention to him.

Murray plainly saw that Sergeant Doyle had something else on his mind and waited patiently until it should come forth. At last Doyle looked up, a worried frown on his forehead.

"Looka here, bo, you know s'well as I do that them fingerprint experts in

Washington one o' these days is goin' to compare the India ink impression o' Private, First Class, Murray, with all other similar identification—and if they find one jest like . . ." The sergeant's voice trailed off.

"There's going to be hell popping." Murray completed the sentence and nodded soberly. "Sure, I know it, but what's the use of crossing bridges before you set foot on them?"

Doyle looked up half admiringly.

"Yeah, bo, but I've known guys to get ten years for it. And ten years lookin' over the greasy waters stretchin' between Alcatraz and the shore ain't nothin' to sneeze about."

Murray's eyes clouded, and for a second his shoulders sagged. Then he straightened.

"Maybe so, and again, maybe not," he replied. "You can't ever tell how a cat's going to jump by listening to her purr. I'll head forth into the unknown wilds of Siberia and see what I can do on this job, anyway. Maybe it'll be worth my while after all. You never can tell." And he picked up his reins.

"Where you headin' for in particular?" asked Doyle as Murray's horse started up in obedience to his heels.

"Out to a place named the den of the Red Spider," Murray called over his shoulder as the Cossacks started behind him.

"What the hell!"

By this time the column had moved several yards and was beginning to trot.

"You'll never come outa that hole alive!" Murray heard the words of Sergeant Doyle borne to him on the wind, but only shook his head and continued on his course.

CHAPTER III

THE FIGHT IN THE FOREST

"HE'SH a happy, cheerful li'l fellah, that Shargeant Doyle." Travers raised his drooping head from his chest and jerked a thumb backward to where the sergeant's figure could still dimly be seen in the dusk.

Murray nodded noncommittally, not even confessing to himself that the obvious concern of the old soldier they had left behind had affected him. Another thought was beginning to take shape in his brain and he glanced sidewise to where Michaeloff rode. The face of the Russian was set toward the front.

There was something queer about this Michaeloff. Several times Murray had surprised a flicker of a smile on the other man's face. It struck him suddenly that Michaeloff, for a prisoner being led against his friends, against his will, was not nearly so downcast as he should be. Of course that was it—he was leading them to certain capture and knew it, biding his time patiently until they should arrive. Murray nodded to himself, a plan suddenly forming itself in his mind.

To think was to act, and his first motion was to reach over and smack Travers smartly across the back. That worthy, half aroused and wholly indignant, struck out blindly from the shoulder, nearly dislocating his arm by the vehemence of his blow against nothing more *tangible* than thin air.

"Help!" shouted Travers. "Somebody knifed me!"

"No one is blunting any good knife against your thick hide," comforted Murray. "Wake up and come to life. I want some dope from you."

"I'm wounded," groaned Travers, feeling for traces of the life blood that he felt sure was seeping from him.

"No such luck." Murray was becoming impatient. "Look here, come out of this coma. Tell your Cossack friends to take Michaeloff up forward where he can't listen in."

Grumbling, Travers did as he was told. It had grown quite dark by now and they had long since passed the last houses of the village. The road wound through a forest. Above them, between the branches of the trees, they could see the occasional gleam of a star. The Cossacks accompanied the cheerful tinkle and clink of bits and spur chains and the steady sound of horses' hoofs on the dirt road with a song, a brooding, half barbaric nomad melody called "Cossack, Cossack, Where Are You Going?"

Murray shifted himself in the unfamiliar high crowned Cossack saddle, with its leather rolls along the sides, and reaching down felt a coil of rope hung to the pommel, and on the off side of the cantle the handle of a *nagaika*, the heavy Cossack whip, its thongs weighted with lead balls, that has made the Cossack the terror of Russian crowds for generations. Travers had ridden ahead and was in earnest colloquy with the leading Cossacks. His talk bore fruit, for two of them rode back and led Michaeloff up forward.

The cold night air combined with the swift trot of the Cossack ponies was beginning to drive the fumes of the vodka out of Travers' head. Grouchy he was, but he could at least talk more or less coherently.

"Listen here, Travers," asked Murray, "what do you know about this Red Spider?"

"I've heard lots but it sounds to me like a lotta hooey," growled Travers.

"Well, what have you heard?" pressed Murray patiently.

"Well, according to what the folks hereabouts says, this Red Spider guy is bad medicine. He's kinda the head of all the Bolshies in Siberia. I reckon he's a suah enough puhson all right, but I don't believe all the things they done said about him."

"What are those things?"

"They said some powahful queah things." Travers shook his head.

"All right, never mind them. Tell me, does this Red Spider fellow keep a gang around him?"

Travers nodded.

"You're damn' tootin' he does—all the bums and thugs in Siberia and a few impo'ted from foreign pa'ts."

"How many do you suppose?"

"A coupla or three hundred, maybe moah, maybe less."

"Where do these Cossacks we're with hang out?"

"They all roost in what they calls a *stanitza*, a kinda fortified Cossack town down heah fo' or five miles."

"Who's their boss and how many of them are there?"

"Guy called Kargadoff is their ataman. He's got ninety or a hundred men with him all the time, sometimes moah."

Murray nodded.

"All right, we'll head in and see this fellow Kargadoff first before we start operations on this Spider lad. Tell the Cossacks to lead us to him."

Travers looked at him a moment, speculatively.

"Sometimes, Murray, ole socks, you ain't so all fiahed dumb as you might be," he said and, setting heels to his pony's flanks, galloped ahead.

MURRAY rode steadily forward, paying little attention to the road. Long training as a cavalryman had, however, habituated him or his subconscious self to keeping an eye out to front and flanks.

For some few minutes past he had felt rather than seen a movement in the trees bordering the road, and had the feeling that the group of horsemen was being shadowed, whether by animals or men he did not know. There were wolves in this part of Siberia and, as he knew, especially fierce ones.

Travers was ahead, talking to the leading Cossacks who had Michaeloff in their charge. Behind Murray there were three or four Cossacks bringing up the rear, their long lances brushing the low hanging branches of the trees as they trotted along.

Suddenly Murray stiffened in the saddle and felt instinctively for his revolver. Something had moved out past the shadow of that great pine tree on the road and had disappeared as quickly into the gloom on the far side. It was too large for the shadow of a wolf. It was too large for the shadow of a deer. It was large enough to be the shadow of a horse and rider.

There was a sudden piercing shout from Michaeloff. The shout was echoed from before and behind. Murray heard the explosion of a rifle and a bullet whistled overhead. The road suddenly filled with a boiling mass of men and horses.

In the darkness it was difficult to tell friend from enemy. The Cossacks behind Murray closed in and faced to the rear, lances at the charge.

Between Travers and the group of Cossacks ahead were several strange horsemen. One of these rode at Murray, who caught the dull gleam of steel as the man came nearer. Murray's gun was in his hand, seeming to fire of its own volition, so that the oncoming horse checked and reared. The rider tumbled heavily from the saddle. Directly in rear of the fallen rider appeared two more who came at undiminished speed.

Murray's pistol cracked twice. The nearest rider screamed and clutched his shoulder; his horse, startled, veered and jerked him from the saddle. The second rider came on, seemingly untouched. Again Murray pressed finger to trigger but this time there was only a click. Swiftly he remembered those two shots he had fired in the air at the vodka cabin, and as swiftly shoved the gun into his blouse. There was no time to reload. The horseman was almost upon him, a gleaming length of steel aimed at his throat. Reaching downward to the cantle of the saddle, Murray disengaged the *nagaika*. As a boxer avoids a blow with a quick jerk of his head, Murray dodged the steel point of that sword as it was almost at his throat and, as the enemy swept even with him, he rose in his stirrups and swung the terrible whip full into the fellow's face, bringing it down with a vicious multiple crack that was the combined impact of all the leaden weighted leather thongs.

The man screamed in agony, clutching at his eyes as though blinded, his saber falling from his nerveless fingers. Swooping low in the saddle, Murray retrieved the fallen blade, finding it a long, straight, keen thrusting weapon excellently balanced to the hand. Exulting, he raised it aloft and, setting heels to his mount, drove forward into the press that surrounded Travers and the Cossacks forward.

With a shout he drove at the nearest enemy, the long keen blade flashing like a tongue of lightning, its sharp point piercing cloth and flesh until it met bone. Again and again he thrust, leaning low on his horse's neck, now thrusting to the front, now to the rear, and again rising in his stirrups. Once a man drove in under his guard with a long curved dagger. For a second Murray felt a searing flame along his left arm. But before the attacker had time to drive the blow home, Murray had smashed him full in the face with the hilt of the sword, a blow that dropped the man as though he had been struck by a falling tree.

The attackers had thinned out. Up ahead Travers was fighting off two men, having found himself a carbine somewhere which he was using as a club. As Murray rode to his aid, he saw Travers bring the clubbed weapon down on the arm of one of his attackers, breaking the arm so thoroughly, so completely that the snap of the shattered bone could be heard plainly. The other turned and fled. Four or five men back in the shadows of the trees galloped away, the noise of their crashing progress easily discernible. Murray and Travers turned to the aid of their companions. Of the group of three Cossacks in front, only two were left. The third had fallen. From behind rode up the rear guard of three men. The lone Cossack who had ridden ahead as advance guard returned unscathed.

"Where is Michaeloff?" demanded Murray.

Every one sought for him, on the ground, among the bodies of the slain, but there was no trace. The Cossacks were about to dispatch the wounded, when Murray forbade it, much to their astonishment.

One of the Cossacks finally volunteered the information that Michaeloff had ridden off immediately after sending forth the shout that had called the attacking force down on them.

"Soon's he heard we were goin' to the

Cossack *stanitza* 'stead o' to the Red Spider's, he beat it. Yes, suh, he suah as hell put wings on hisself and went speedin' outa heah." Travers grinned cheerfully, all traces of his late dissipation vanished.

THE DAMAGES were small, considering the fierceness of the fight. Murray had a ripped sleeve and a slight flesh wound in the arm. Travers had come off untouched. One of the Cossacks had a bandaged wrist from a pistol bullet, another a saber thrust through the shoulder. One Cossack had been killed, but his loss seemed to bother his companions but little, so familiar were these people with war and death.

The direction of their march was changed and after another few minutes' brisk trot they came to a side road into which they turned to proceed to the Cossack *stanitza.*

They approached it to the barking of what seemed a great number of dogs—the mongrel curs that infest every Cossack habitation—lean, wolfish creatures that appeared and disappeared in and out of the shadows like phantoms.

The *stanitza* was a small village composed of log huts set behind secure log palisades, quite like a frontier village of the early days on the Western borders of the United States.

Barefoot women and girls stared at the strangers curiously as they dismounted in front of the largest and most imposing log house of the ataman. A feast was in progress—one of the many saint's days of Russia, most probably—and the house was lighted brilliantly, while booted and spurred Cossacks came and went and servants filled tin cups with vodka.

The ataman, to whom immense respect was paid by these ordinarily free thinking, independent warriors, was hospitality itself. Without a word of inquiry as to the possible mission or business of the Americans in that place, he courteously assisted at their dismounting and waved them within the house where servants offered them drinks, welcome in the chill of the evening after the long ride. Travers' eyes lighted up as he reached for his cup, brimming with the potent vodka, but Murray frowned at him.

"Lay off that, old-timer; I may need you badly tonight," he said quietly. Travers nodded, thereafter contenting himself with sipping at the one cup.

Tables were set in a spacious anteroom, covered with all manner of caviar, with salads, black bread and butter, with dried sturgeon and salmon, and tasty bits of cheese and a variety of meat pastes. It was the famous Russian *zakuska,* which, washed down with copious drafts of vodka, is guaranteed to put any guest in a favorable frame of mind for the heavy dinner which follows, providing he does not founder first.

Very ceremonious were the Cossacks, drinking the health of their guests with much clicking of heels and many bows, taking care to empty the cup each time and placing it downward on the table cloth in proof of their good will. From another room came the sound of accordions and *balalaikas,* strumming and sobbing through the wild strains of Gypsy and Tartar songs which sound like laments at times, again like peans of victory. High above the music rose the volume of voices, and the more toasts that were downed the higher rose the voices.

Soon they all filed into the dinner itself, where Murray, being the taller and by far the more distinguished looking of the two American guests, was placed at the right hand of the ataman.

Kargadoff was a handsome Russian, well over six feet in height, black browed and mustached, with flashing and imperious eyes. He made a handsome figure in his flowing, wine colored Cossack coat with its double rows of ivory and silver cartridge holders across the chest, and the gold marks of his rank emblazoned on his broad shoulders. Lean he was, and supple, swaying from the hips like a dancer, and narrow waisted. Not for nothing was he known as the best wrestler and swordsman among the Ussuri Cossacks, a reputation to which he owed his position as sub-ataman under Kalmikoff, whose golden K he wore dutifully embroidered on his coat sleeve, as did all the Cossacks of the Ussuri.

Murray and Kargadoff took time to size each other up, and at the end of their respective inspections there flashed from one to the other of them a look of mutual respect, and a weight lifted itself a little from Murray's shoulders.

"That Russky herring eater is a real man. It's the half men who are always so hard to get along with," he thought.

Some word of Murray's handiness with the revolver must have come to Kargadoff's ears, for he turned to his guest and in very good English felicitated him on his skill.

Murray nodded absently.

"But being able to shoot well with a revolver isn't enough for the job I'm trying to do," he said.

Kargadoff raised his eyebrows politely.

"And what is that, if I may ask?" he inquired.

WITHOUT mincing any words Murray told him frankly. Kargadoff listened until he had finished.

"A difficult task." He sighed sympathetically. "A very difficult task, for this man called the Red Spider is not an ordinary Bolshevist. He is a ruined nobleman with a keen brain and an almost devilish ability. No, my friend, I should advise you to give it up. You and your companion can do nothing against him. You will be caught in his web and slaughtered."

Murray looked at him long and thoughtfully. Then, spacing his words, he spoke with deliberation.

"I can well believe," he said, "that he must indeed be a man of extraordinary power if his reputation is such that a brave leader like you, with brave followers such as yours, can hold him in such respect that you are afraid to avenge the death of one of your men at his hands."

Murray stared straight ahead, well aware of the fact that Kargadoff's face had suddenly lost its smile of good fellowship, and that his brows had drawn down bleakly and angrily. The American waited, drumming idly on the table until at last the Russian spoke—in a voice which he strove to keep under control.

"It is considered in Russia a slight on the part of a guest to impugn the courage of his host," he said.

"I spoke with no intention of slighting my host," replied Murray, "but I spoke frankly and told the truth. We are men, you and I." He turned and looked full into the other's eyes. "Is it not true that you do not make reprisals against this Red Spider because you fear him?"

"Prudence is one thing, cowardice another. I have barely a hundred men under my command—most of them ex-officers of the old régime, it is true—but the Red Spider has nearly three hundred, all well armed and equipped."

Murray considered for a moment, then raised his head.

"There is another Cossack force near here?" he asked.

Again Kargadoff frowned.

"Yes, a detachment of Trans-Baikal Cossacks, Ataman Semionoff's men, commanded by the Sub-Ataman Brodensky. Unfortunately we are not on good terms. In fact, they are on better terms with the Red Spider than they are with me."

"How many of them are there?"

"Nearly two hundred, all told."

"How far away?"

"About three *versts* from here."

"Look here—" Murray leaned forward—"if I win over this Semionoff outfit, will you join them to fight the Bolsheviki and aid me rescue my lieutenant?"

"But surely," replied the Russian.

"Will you help me win them over, give me ten men to accompany me to their *stanitza*—ten men who will obey my orders implicitly?"

"Yes," answered the Russian, a little puzzled.

"Good!" Murray leaned back, relaxing. "That is understood. I would like to start with them in twenty minutes."

The Russian shook his head at the impetuosity of these Americans who never said *"seechas"*, which means anything from "in five minutes" to "in five months" with the Russian, but insisted upon doing things immediately. Then he agreed, giving some orders in a low tone to an officer who sat near. Scarcely had this man disappeared when he again reappeared, his face red with excitement, his eyes bulging. His spectacular entry stopped the loud talking and singing.

In the silence of the hall he shouted something in Russian. That it was news of some importance Murray gathered from the sudden and complete sobering up of the Cossacks around the great table. They seemed carved in stone. So still was it that one could hear the heavy breathing of men who had eaten and drunk too much. There was a tightening up of belts and a feeling for sword hilts. All men looked expectantly at Kargadoff, who stared straight ahead, idly fingering his untasted cup of vodka.

Finally the Russian turned toward Murray.

"You will have to excuse me from furnishing you the ten men at the moment," he said quietly, "but it seems that the Red Spider, with some three hundred men and many machine guns, is marching to attack us in revenge for the killing of so many of his followers this evening. He is only some fifteen minutes away."

CHAPTER IV

COSSACKS IN BATTLE

THE NEWS was unpleasant as far as the Americans were concerned, but judging by the worried looks of the ataman and the disquiet expressed by his followers, it was serious to the Russians.

Kargadoff stared, frowning, over the crowded dining hall, giving no orders, while his men grew more and more uneasy.

"You say the Red Spider outfit is about fifteen minutes away?" asked Murray.

Kargadoff nodded somberly.

"We are short on ammunition," he said.

"Well, don't sit here and wait to be attacked. Ride out and hit them before they get here." Murray's voice was a little impatient.

"God and the devil! You are right—it is our only chance!"

Kargadoff suddenly came to life. It was the spark he needed to fire his numbed faculties. He rose to his feet and shouted out a succession of quick orders in biting, resonant Russian. A cheer went up from his followers. They swarmed to the doors, tightening belts and adjusting pistols and sabers.

Kargadoff beckoned to the two Americans and the three went outside—where the village was boiling with swift, purposeful activity. Old men, women and boys were aiding the Cossacks to saddle, handing them their weapons and cheering them to the echo.

One man after another galloped to his place in a column which formed in front of the ataman's house. The coal black stallion ridden by Kargadoff was brought up, as were the two horses ridden by Travers and Murray.

"Seems as if we run into a fight ever' place we sets foot," complained Travers, looking longingly back at the warm dining room and the almost untouched dinner and vodka.

Murray did not answer, but watched curiously as this *sotnia* of Cossacks formed along the road in a sort of column of squads formation, each leading set of fours in the formation carrying lances, while the rear set carried sabers and carbines. They went to their places, these Cossacks, in businesslike fashion. There was a quick roll call; a non-commissioned officer roared out a report, saluting; the ataman replied and issued a command. The lance pennons were loosened to the breeze, and the *sotnia* set forth at a gallop.

Murray rode on the ataman's left and thrilled to the thunder of the hundred galloping horses behind him. They swung out of the main gate of the village, which was closed behind the last horseman, while the women and the old men and boys manned the walls and the crude towers at the corners.

"What are you going to do, Ataman, attack them in front?" Murray asked Kargadoff.

The Russian nodded, bending low in his saddle and scanning the road ahead.

"Why not let me take sixteen men and hit them on the flank at the same time? I'll make 'em think it's the whole American Army on their tails," suggested Murray.

Kargadoff nodded quickly and yelled a curt order behind him, which was rapidly passed down the column.

"Take the last sixteen men," he directed.

Murray beckoned to Travers and the two drew aside until the rear of the column drew up, then placed themselves at the head of the last four sets of fours.

The grueling pace continued for several minutes more. Then the two Americans heard a savage yell from the front and a wild cheer broke out from the *sotnia* of Cossacks.

"Here's where we do our stuff," Murray said to Travers.

He motioned to the Cossacks behind him to follow, broke out of the road and led his men among the trees to the left. On his right hand, from the direction of the road, he heard shouts and screams and wild cheers, with an occasional pistol shot and the clang of steel against steel.

Galloping parallel to the road until he judged himself to be well toward the rear of the enemy column, he suddenly veered toward it, and when some ten yards from the enemy brought his men to a halt and motioned them to dismount.

They swarmed out of their saddles quickly, carrying their rifles and leaving the led horses in charge of one of their number.

"Tell these birds that when I say the word 'fire' to start shooting as fast as they can and to make a noise like an army. You take the left, I'll take the right. Holler all the orders in American you can think of."

Travers nodded and translated to the Cossacks, who grinned, getting the idea immediately.

The battle seemed to be ebbing and flowing on the road. The crackle of pistols sounded more frequently.

Murray led his men at a run, motioning them to spread out to the right and left. Coming suddenly to a stop, he waved them down, then rose and cupped his hands.

"Come on, you tough American doughboys, give these Bolshies hell!"

His voice rang out clearly above the tumult. There was a lull in the fighting while the Bolsheviki tried to puzzle out this new sound.

"First, second and third companies in the firing line, fourth company in reserve. Battle sight. Fire at will! Rapid *fire!*"

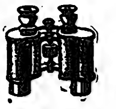
A fusillade of shots and shouting broke out in the woods as the Cossacks obeyed orders. On the left Travers was yelling enough orders to have maneuvered a division into battle; the Cossacks *trampled* and bellowed through the brush.

A sudden cry went up from the enemy.

"*Amerikanskis!*" they screamed, and began to fall back.

Forward, where Kargadoff was fighting, there came cheer after cheer and his men took up the cry.

"*Amerikanski!*"



FROM his position Murray could see the Bolsheviki, dressed in every and any sort of costume, but well laden with ammunition bandoleers, and watched as they fell slowly to the rear, looking about them fearfully. To accelerate their progress he fired into their huddled mass, dropping one man after another. The bullets from the Cossack carbines were taking effect in the jam of men and animals and the retreat changed into a wild rout, men suddenly throwing away their weapons and fighting their way to the rear like savage animals.

It was hard to restrain his Cossacks from hacking their way into the crush, filled with blood lust as they were. Only after Murray had knocked a man down did the rest take the hint and stay where they were ordered.

Soon the leading files of Kargadoff's outfit came into view, harrying the retreating enemy viciously. The long lances stabbed and lifted, and dipped and stabbed again.

It was high time to let his own men in on the retreat and Murray quickly mounted them, galloping farther down the road where again he charged, with the Cossacks mounted behind him, into the weary and panic stricken mob. Murray sought for the man called the Spider but the two or three prisoners who surrendered to him were too far gone to understand, and too abject to worry with questionings.

In the rear of the retreating force and along both sides of the forest road, the pursuing Cossacks harassed and fought the Bolsheviki like a pack of wolves. All semblance of order was lost in the enemy forces; the greater part of them were filled with no other ambition than to get out of danger as quickly as possible, no matter where.

Kargadoff rode by once, and shouted, "*Ochinn Chorashaw!*" Then, "Splendid!" his eyes alight with the fire of victory.

With Travers and the sixteen Cossacks, Murray galloped on through the woods, paralleling again the route of the defeated force, and came out of the forest into an open field. From the edges of this field, bathed in the rays of the newly risen moon, he could see the defeated Bolsheviki streaming down the road. He raised his head sharply.

There, about five hundred yards across the far edge of the field, was a reserve of about a hundred men, as nearly as he could judge in the dim light. These were being quietly posted by their leader behind an earthen wall and ditch that marked the far boundary of the field. Murray studied this leader, long and intently. The danger of the situation was evident. The remaining Bolsheviki in retreat were gradually clearing off the road. The victorious Cossacks would gallop straight into the trap and be mowed down like grass under the rifles of the concealed Bolsheviki.

"Anyway, that fellow calling himself the Red Spider knows his business," grunted Murray to Travers.

Then, followed by his men, he galloped back to where he had last seen Kargadoff.

He was not a moment too soon. The ataman was reorganizing his *sotnia* preparatory to resuming the pursuit. In another five minutes he would inevitably have led them under the fire of the Bolsheviki ambush. His face paled as Murray gave him the information.

"We are very heavily outnumbered as it is," he stated. "Best that we withdraw." He looked uncertainly at Murray.

The American shook his head.

"If you withdraw now they'll follow up and attack your town and you will be out of luck. Why not hit them in the flank of their dismounted line? Send a few men down the road here to make a demonstration, then roll them up with rifle fire on the flank."

"Good," grunted the ataman, and shouted out his orders.

Murray led off at a gallop, followed by Travers, Kargadoff and the *sotnia* streaming behind him through the woods until they came out at the far end of the field.

Here Murray signaled them to dismount and, leaving the horses with a few men, the column of Cossacks in single file made their way quietly across the field, moving in the shadows of the trees.

They came at last to the wall. Far down its length they could hear a rustle and movement as of many men, and could see, by peering through the uncertain light, the vague flitting of shadows that advertised the ambush arranged by the Bolsheviki.

The ataman lined his men up where they could best secure a clear field of fire down the wall, and then gave the signal.

THE RATTLE and roar of some seventy carbines split the air. There were shouts and screams and a feeble return of fire from the far end of the earthen wall, but this surprise attack was too much for the already shattered nerves of the

Bolsheviki, and their scattering shots died out as the Cossacks kept up their hot fire.

"You'd better lay off, Ataman. They're all gone," said Murray, "and you haven't an awful lot of ammunition to waste. Have you searched the enemy dead and wounded yet for all those bandoleers they're carrying?"

The ataman had not, but gave command for ceasing fire—a hard thing to accomplish with the Cossacks, many of whom kept on until their rifles were kicked out of their hands.

At Murray's suggestion, led horses were brought up and searching parties sent out for the enemy ammunition. The Bolsheviki had withdrawn in full retreat.

"What shall we do know?" the ataman asked.

"Simple enough," answered the American. "Let's ride over and get the other Cossack outfit to help us clean out this gang!"

"But—" Kargadoff looked uncertain.

"But you thought in the pleasant Russian way that you'd keep the Red Spider around to fight against for the next twenty years." Murray's grin, when he wanted to soften a hard point, was an infectious thing. Kargadoff smiled in spite of himself.

"You Americans—" He raised his hands and laughed. "All right, but winning over my good friend Brodensky of the Semionoff Cossacks is no light task. How are you going to accomplish it?"

Murray shrugged his shoulders.

"Leave that to time and circumstance," he suggested, "and let's go."

Kargadoff laughed again and issued his orders.

The searching parties came back heavily laden with bandoleers of ammunition, which were distributed among the Cossacks. The *sotnia*, less the ten or twelve men who had fallen in the fighting, gathered on its leader and formed line—a long double rank with the lances standing like a forest of young trees above it.

The three *versts* to Brodensky's *stanitza* were soon covered, the Cossacks singing happily as the horses trotted steadily ahead through the dark night.

A long narrow valley led them upward to its beginning, where a low lying hill was covered by the walls and log huts of the Semionoff *stanitza*. All was dark as they approached, and all was silent except the barking of the aroused dogs.

"Maybe you'd better let me manage this while you lay low and keep silent," advised Murray; and so it was agreed.

Kargadoff dismounted his Cossacks quietly while Murray and Travers went boldly forward to the silent *stanitza*.

"How in the name of all that's holy are you aimin' to pull this heah stunt?" Travers asked as they rode toward the silent walls of the village.

"Search me. All I know is that we've only got until tomorrow night to drag that poor second looie from an untimely demise. So far we haven't done so badly."

"I'll tell all and sundry we haven't," chuckled Travers. "Man alive, we suah been steppin' high, wide and frequent since we sta'ted this heah pa'ty."

They had approached the gate by now. A sleepy looking sentinel armed with a saber barred their advance.

"You talk to him, Travers. Tell him we've got to see his boss on urgent matters of state or any other cockeyed yarn you can cook up on the spur of the moment."

And Travers waved his arms and talked, with the result that finally the sentinel called some one, evidently a non-commissioned officer of the guard, who demanded further explanations. The officer was far from friendly; being waked out of a sound sleep at this hour of the night had not contributed to his good nature to any noticeable extent.

"Tell him to tell his chief that the Red Spider was on his way to capture this place tonight, and that we're holding him off back here several *versts*," said Murray, on a sudden idea.

The non-commissioned officer listened more respectfully to this and finally left, after giving very careful instructions to the sentinel to keep a sharp eye on these suspicious strangers. After what seemed hours—in reality only a few minutes—the man returned and, growling, bade the two enter, lighting the way with an old fashioned horn lantern.

Inside the gate was a watch fire, around which were huddled three or four men who stared suspiciously at the two Americans as they followed the officer.

Glancing swiftly at the barracks, the stables and the log huts, Murray estimated that there must be accommodations for all of three hundred men in the place. And sizing up the saddles piled outside the stable doors, he judged that there were at least two hundred mounted men and their animals quartered in the place.

They were led to the anteroom of what seemed to be the headquarters building. Here they waited until the non-commissioned officer went into an inner room, evidently to report. As they stood there, the outer door opened and three Cossack officers, booted and spurred and wearing sabers and pistols, came in. Without vouchsafing the Americans so much as a single look, they went on into the inner room and closed the door.

In about five minutes the non-commissioned officer returned and beckoned them to follow.

MURRAY strode in first, followed by Travers. They entered a large square room dominated by a single great table. Seated at this were the three officers who had entered a few moments previously. At the head of the table sat a tall, thin, white faced officer, whose opaque blue eyes seemed to stare at them without ever looking directly at them.

"I am Lieutenant Vezredonoff, the adjutant for the Ataman Brodensky," he said in English. His voice was high and clear, and perfectly emotionless.

"And these gentlemen?" Murray pointed at the other three officers and waited.

The adjutant looked startled for a second.

"These are the *sotnia* commanders of Ataman Brodensky's force. The ataman is absent and I felt it necessary to call them in to hear what you had to say. Will you kindly state your business?"

"Before stating my business, I should like to ask you a question," Murray returned quietly.

"Yes?" The adjutant raised his white eyebrows as though annoyed.

"Is this Cossack force allied with the Americans and their Allies in Siberia, or is it with the Bolsheviki?"

Had he exploded a bombshell the effect could not have been more startling. One of the three officers seated at the table leaped to his feet and shouted something in Russian.

"Score one—that bird speaks and understands English," whispered Murray to Travers.

The officer pounded on the table and shouted at his companions. Whatever it was, they seemed to agree, nodding their heads slowly as he made his points. The adjutant, looking extremely fatigued and bored, leaned back idly and lighted a cigaret.

Finally all three officers looked inquiringly at the adjutant. He spoke in Russian, pointing at the two Americans. That the remark was far from complimentary was plain to be seen.

The Cossack officer who had become so excited—a small, wiry, intense looking little man—grew angry again, and again he hammered the table so that the adjutant subsided. He maintained, however, that sleepy look of indifference.

"It's taking a long time for a very simple question to be answered." Murray spoke sharply.

Then the small officer offered both Americans chairs, bowing as he did so. Both Murray and Travers figured that the pro-American side had won.

The adjutant listened with very poor grace to some instructions given him by the little officer, who, Murray reasoned, must be senior troop commander in the absence of Brodensky.

It was this officer who answered in place of the adjutant.

"You must pardon us for our verree unpolite welcoom," he said with a decided accent, "but there hass been soome difference of opeenion on the question you have asked."

He shot a look at the adjutant which should have shriveled up that blasé person; but he merely yawned.

"I gathered that much," said Murray and smiled. "My question is answered then in the affirmative?"

"In the affirmateeve, absolutely," answered the Russian, and said something to the other two, who nodded.

"That being the case, then, I have come to ask your cooperation," said Murray.

There was some discussion as the three talked this over, during which Murray caught the opaque blue eyes of the adjutant fixed upon him coldly, almost murderously, a look which, seen over the top of a pair of lined up rifle sights, would have meant certain death.

"But before I ask for your cooperation, I must have some information," Murray's voice interrupted the discussion. Every one looked at him. "May I ask what sort of a looking man is your ataman? It comes to me that I may know him personally—may have met him."

Again the adjutant flashed a murderous look at him. But the wiry little officer answered immediately.

"He is very thin, very tall, very dark—That is his picture." He pointed to a portrait on the wall at the end of the room.

"Does he walk a little after this fashion?"

And Murray rose and walked with one shoulder hunched forward, his body twisted.

"Exactly!" said the little Russian—a captain, to give his rank.

Murray's eyes narrowed. He looked at the adjutant who, for the first time, began to appear a little apprehensive.

"Would it seem unreasonable if I asked to speak to you three officers alone?" He nodded toward the adjutant.

The captain looked from one to the other and slowly nodded, as if confirming something in his own mind.

"No," he said shortly.

He spoke in Russian to the adjutant, who stalked to the door, his head high, an air of supercilious disdain about him.

There was a lightning exchange of glances between Murray and Travers. Travers rose, his hand thrust inside his blouse, and followed the adjutant out the door.

Murray faced the three officers.

"Gentlemen," he said gravely, "I came to ask for your aid in fighting the Red Spider." He looked long and searchingly at the three before him—so long and so searchingly that the little captain grew impatient.

"Yes, go on," he said.

Murray looked up at the portrait on the wall at the end of the room.

"And I find, gentlemen, that your Ataman Brodensky is the Red Spider!"

CHAPTER V

TRAPPED

THE WIRY little Cossack officer stared at Murray, frowning. When he spoke his voice was blurred and uncertain.

"That is very seerious statement you make. To say that our ataman and the Red Spider are one and the same man is dangerous. What makes you say this theeng?"

Murray shrugged his shoulders.

"Your man Brodensky is absent very often, isn't he?"

The Russian nodded, albeit somewhat unwillingly.

"He is absent right now, isn't he?"

Again the Russian nodded.

"Well—" Murray leaned back, watching them guardedly—"I saw him not over an hour ago leading an attack of Bolsheviki against the forces of Ataman Kargadoff!"

"Incredible!" breathed the little captain, but in his eyes was a queer look, as though Murray's statement had confirmed a suspicion which he already held.

He spoke to the other two officers.

They sat bolt upright when he began to speak.

"*Nyet! Nyet!*—No! No!" they said vehemently, shaking their heads in violent negation.

The captain spread his hands helplessly and argued with them until that same look of brooding uncertainty came into their eyes.

"And what's more," Murray broke in on the discussion, "this officer who has just left, the adjutant, knows it and is a party to it!"

"Lieutenant Vezredonoff!" All three officers spoke the name simultaneously, and in such a tone that Murray concluded that Vezredonoff was no prime favorite with them. Again they broke into an excited discussion, arguing all of them at once, and at the top of their voices. Murray interrupted again.

"So the question is," he said deliberately, "whether you, these officers and the men, are loyal to Semionoff, your head ataman, or to Sub-Ataman Brodensky, who is undoubtedly a Bolshevist."

"I am Captain Prince Piotr Alexandrovich Mislaffsky," said the little officer stiffly, "and loyal to nothing which even faintly smells of Bolshevism. These other officers are equally loyal to their salt."

"Good." Murray nodded. "Then it only remains to decide upon what to do with your Ataman Brodensky. How many of your men has he with him?"

"None, except his orderly. He goes forth alone always with this orderly, who iss a stupid creature but verree devoted. We have always thought that Brodensky had a lady somewhere whom he visited."

"And what about this adjutant fellow, Lieutenant Vezredonoff?" Murray asked.

Again the discussion arose. Murray cocked his ear toward the outer door.

"If I'm not mistaken" he interrupted, "Lieutenant Vezredonoff has taken his own measures."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before Travers flung open the door and stumbled in, his face white, his hands holding his belt.

"That guy up and kicked me in the stomach and beat it," he gasped. "He's out theah now shoutin' to the soldiahs!"

They could hear the sound of a loud voice and shouts and the running of many feet.

Murray rose swiftly.

"We've got no time to waste," he said quickly.

Travers was swearing. The three Russian officers were uncertain and bewildered; things were happening too fast for them.

"Let's get out by the gate—I've got some men outside. If we can make that guardhouse in the tower by the gate we are safe." And Murray headed for the door without further words. Travers and the Russians followed him.

Outside, the parade ground was filling with men. In the far corner nearest the barracks of the men, stood Lieutenant Vezredonoff haranging a group of half clad soldiers, holding aloft a lantern as he spoke.

The light from the opened door of the headquarters building showed the exit of the three Russian officers and the Americans. Vezredonoff's voice rose to a scream as he saw them. A shot came from the darkness and a bullet buried itself in a log not ten feet from Murray's head. There certainly was no time to lose. With heads bent low the party of Americans and Russians streaked rapidly toward the gates and the small tower which flanked them on one side. There was no one on duty there. The gates were locked. The sound of running feet and yelling behind them forced them to seek shelter in the guard tower.

Murray waited until the last of them was inside the heavy door, then slammed it shut as the foremost of their pursuers, naked sword in hand, was almost upon them.

OUTSIDE, fists and booted feet hammered against the door. Inside, they found themselves in a square room lined with several bunks. Above the bunks on the side toward the forest there ran a small firing platform to give access to six or eight loopholes in the wall. A taper burned before an ikon in one corner. What struck Murray immediately was the presence of several carbines placed in a rack on the wall and, hung below them, many heavy looking bandoleers of ammunition.

A crude staircase led to an upper floor. Climbing this quickly, Murray found himself in a room as large as the one beneath, but better in that there was one narrow window which looked down on the interior of the stockade. The parade ground was filled with men in all stages of dress and there was much yelling and excitement. The *stanitza* had all the air of being in the throes of a mutiny.

The little captain, Prince Mislaffsky, followed him up and looked morosely out the window at the confusion on the parade ground.

"He has undoubtedly told them a verree bad lot of lies to make them act in such a fashion," he said in his precise English. Then a little more hopefully, "There! I see some of my men."

Before Murray could stop him he had opened the heavy wooden shutter the whole way and called something down at the men below. There was the sharp crack of a carbine and a bullet zinged against the side of the window casing. Mislaffsky drew his head in again and closed the shutter, his shoulders sagging.

"It was Nicolai, one of my best men," he said sadly.

On the side of the room toward the gate there was an embrasure which directly covered the entrance to the stockade.

"At any rate, if we can't get out the gate no one else can either get out or in," said Murray, pointing to it. But Mislaffsky was too upset to hear. One of the loopholes in the forest side of the room was placed in a shutter so that it could be swung out, making a fair sized window.

"That helps," grunted Murray, who had been wondering how he was going to get word to Kargadoff, who waited outside with his *sotnia* of Cossacks.

The first pale light of dawn was beginning to show in the east. Looking at it, Murray reflected somberly that this was the beginning of the day whose end was to see the death of the American lieutenant in the hands of the Red Spider and his Bolshevist followers.

Striding toward the window giving on the forest, he looked out, trying to descry some trace of his friends, the Cossacks of Kargadoff. Peering intently through the morning mist, he thought he could see some movement in the shadow of the forest belt some two hundred yards away.

There was the sound of firing from the parade ground and several bullets thudded against the heavy wooden shutter and the walls of the tower.

"This firing certainly ought to warn Kargadoff that something is up," he said to himself, and looked again for the movement he had detected among the trees outside.

Then he nodded. Yes, that was a mounted man approaching the stockade cautiously. He leaned out the window as the man came nearer, ready to hail him as he came within hearing.

"Veree annoying, this shooting—" Prince Mislaffsky's voice came from behind him—"but not veree harmful. I hope that Vezredonoff doesn't get desperate and use the mountain gun against us."

"Is there a mountain gun here?" Murray turned, his eyes alert.

"Yes, a small piece, but big enough to blow us out of here."

Mislaffsky walked toward the window and peered out through a crack in the shutter. He turned back, his face white.

"The gun is set up at the other end of the parade ground, aimed at the tower. They are loading it now." His voice was calm.

Murray shrugged his shoulders and turned again to his inspection of the approaching horseman. Something familiar about the figure, a Russian in Cossack officer's uniform, caught his eye. Behind the officer rode an orderly. The officer was tall and thin, and hunched his right shoulder forward as he rode.

"Look here, Captain," said Murray, "who is this coming?" He waited for the words which he knew would come as Mislaffsky peered out into the dawn.

"*Bolshoi Moi!*" groaned the Cossack officer. "It is the Ataman Brodensky!"

"And the man I saw directing the Bolsheviki forces!" added Murray. Then both men listened.

There was the sound of thunderous rapping on the door below.

WORRY was one of the vices in which Murray did not indulge. That the Cossacks were about to batter his shelter to pieces with the potent aid of a three-inch mountain gun, and that the Red Spider was approaching from the other side of the *stanitza* spurred him to action rather than to vain recriminations.

"We are lost!" sighed the Russian captain.

"Like hell we are! Get me a rope!" Murray snapped back. Running down the crazy steps to the floor below, he found a length of rope and hurried back with it, followed by the curious and unperturbed Travers.

Taking a hitch around the nearest projecting beam, Murray heaved the length of rope out the window and threw one leg over the sill. But it was Travers who pushed him aside and slid down the rope instead.

"Do you want to have all the fun?" Travers called up.

"All right," agreed Murray. "Get that fellow and bring him back with Kargadoff," he called.

Travers bent low and doubled for the approaching horseman. There was a small rise in the ground between him and the two Russians.

Hurrying up this, Travers met the ataman face to face. In the face of Brodensky the American held the unwavering muzzle of his revolver.

A queer looking man was this Brodensky, all bony angles, and strangely misshapen. Not only was his right shoulder thrown forward as though twisted out of shape, but his whole body followed the same plan. His face was twisted in a wry grin, as though permanently fixed in a sour grin at some huge and elemental joke.

To do the man credit he betrayed no surprise but calmly held up his hands in obedience to Travers' gesture. His orderly was not so sensible, but rode at the American with upraised sword, his face passionate with anger. In spite of his distaste for the task, Travers was forced to shift his revolver ever so slightly and drill a hole in the orderly's arm, effectively quieting him.

In obedience to further signs from Travers, Brodensky slid down from his horse, which Travers promptly mounted, seizing the reins of the orderly's horse at the same time. Driving the Cossack officer on foot before him, Travers rode toward the place where they had last seen Kargadoff and his *sotnia*.

Much to his relief, he found them at the same place, concealed in a fold in the ground. The horses were off a few yards, grazing under the charge of several men. The balance of the company lay about, sleeping or resting.

Kargadoff rose, startled, when he saw the procession approaching, Brodensky started to talk while he was still some yards away, but Travers growled at him with such manifest displeasure that the Russian, who continued his advance with a peculiar sideling motion like a crab or a spider, forebore further words.

Coming to a halt before Kargadoff, Travers explained the whole story in as few words as possible. Kargadoff was too poor an actor to restrain his astonishment and asked question after question, looking from one to the other, amazed and confounded.

Brodensky started a smooth explanation in Russian when Travers gently bade him be silent, reinforcing the order by cocking his revolver.

"Now," he continued, addressing Kargadoff, "we've got to get goin'. Our gang is in the watch towah waitin' for a three-inch shell or two to land on 'em. Have a rope put around this heah fellah's wrists and we'll take him in and straighten things out."

A rope was provided. Kargadoff was still startled out of all reason and Travers had to truss up Brodensky himself. But Kargadoff had sufficient understanding left to assemble his *sotnia* and mount it up.

They were soon in motion toward the stockade.

Travers, carefully keeping the still dismounted Brodensky covered with his revolver, turned to Kargadoff.

"I don't know if we're going to get a kiss or a kick in the pants when we arrive at that gate, but we'll make a stab at it anyhow."

As they came up to the stockade Murray and Prince Mislaffsky could be seen peering down from the window of the tower.

"Listen here, Captain," Murray said to Mislaffsky, "tell your men that we've got Brodensky here, caught red handed fighting with the Bolsheviki against the Cossacks and Americans. Can you get that over without being shot?"

"I shall try, indeed," said Mislaffsky in his precise way. "I do not like to be shot."

MISLAFFSKY orated for several minutes through the window to the men in the stockade, then started down the steps, motioning for the others to follow.

After what seemed an interminable time to the waiting men outside the gate, during which the first rays of the morning sun came up and warmed the chilled, hungry party, the great gate of the stockade opened and Mislaffsky appeared. Murray kept in the background, for reasons of his own.

The Kargadoff men could see the whole Brodensky party lined up in solid ranks, dismounted, their mountain gun pointing straight at the gate.

Kargadoff blanched at the view thus suddenly disclosed to him, but it was too late to turn back. Murray, from his vantage point in the doorway of the tower, saw the Russian cross himself and then go forward, leading his *sotnia* within the gate.

Knowing that he could shoot Brodensky before he could be harmed himself, Travers kept the Bolsheviki leader carefully between himself and the Cossacks of Brodensky's command.

The gates were swung shut behind the party. Travers continued on with his prisoner to the center of the parade. Murray came up then.

"Want any help?" he asked.

"No, I'll keep guard of this heah prisoner if you want your hands free to palavah," he said.

"Good old guy," said Murray. "Just what I wanted."

He rode up to where the three Cossack officers, including Mislaffsky, faced the massed forces of Brodensky's men.

"Tell them, Captain," Murray said to Mislaffsky, "that we caught this fellow red handed, leading the Bolsheviki; that the Americans are after him for the murder of many soldiers; that the English and the Japanese want him; that he hasn't got a ghost of a show and that he *should* be shot immediately."

Mislaffsky nodded and commenced a speech in passionate Russian, waving his arms and shouting.

Standing silently among the Cossacks of Brodensky's command was the pale faced, opaque eyed, bored looking Lieutenant Vezredenoff, the adjutant. Mislaffsky spoke at great length, finally pointing his finger at the lieutenant accusingly so that men around the bored looking young officer drew back, leaving him standing alone.

Mislaffsky ended up with a great burst of oratory which brought nods and exclamations of approval from the assembled soldiers.

Turning to Murray, he said:

"I told them that we would investigate the ataman, give him a fair trial by meelitary coort-martial immediately in headquarters and that they should wait. I have asked them to send five men from each *sotnia* to watch the coort-martial and carry back the news of it to their comrades."

"Snappy work, comrade." Murray nodded in high approval.

The prisoner was put in charge of two of Kargadoff's Cossacks and led toward the headquarters building. Somehow in the excitement Lieutenant Vezredonoff disappeared. His absence was noticed by no one except Murray, who gazed about wondering what had come of him. Ahead of Murray marched the two guards with the prisoner. He stepped back to talk to Mislaffsky when there was a shot, quickly followed by another from the headquarters building.

Over the heads of the crowd Murray saw Vezredonoff suddenly dart toward Brodensky, saw one Cossack guard prone on the ground, the other struggling to his knees as though hard hit, then saw Brodensky dart for the headquarters building with the adjutant, the pair disappearing into the place.

"There is a passage that goes from there to a door in the stockade!" shouted Mislaffsky, running toward the building, Murray close at his heels. The door was locked and barred in their faces.

There was a confused delay for several minutes, ended by Murray.

"To the walls!" he shouted, and rushed to the nearest stockade steps, mounting swiftly to the firing step below its top.

He was just in time to see two figures galloping swiftly out of pistol shot, followed by the faithful orderly, riding hard despite his wound.

Cossacks of Kargadoff's command were sent forth in pursuit. They soon returned, empty handed.

The bird had flown.

CHAPTER VI

MURRAY TAKES COMMAND

IT WAS not until the confusion incident to the escape of Brodensky had time to die down a little that Murray spoke again.

"Well," he remarked, "that sort of clears up the situation at that. Now these Cossacks know he's a crook."

And it was so, for the last vestige of doubt as to the loyalty of the ataman fled with him on his escape. The little captain, Prince Mislaffsky, took charge immediately, and found quarters for the newly arrived Cossacks of Kargadoff's command.

It was after these arrangements were made that the captain rejoined the group in the office at headquarters, a group consisting of the tall and capable looking Kargadoff, Travers, two Cossack captains of the Brodensky detachment and Murray, silent and biding his time.

The Russians and Americans gathered around the table again. Cossack orderlies served them cups of hot tea and fresh baked black bread spread with butter and honey.

It was getting well along toward seven o'clock when cigarets were lighted and the men sat back in a state of replete comfort.

"Every minute lost now," observed Murray quietly, "gives the Red Spider just that much more time to prepare reprisals against us."

No one but Travers noticed that Murray took it for granted that the combined Cossack forces would continue the war against the Red Spider and his Bolsheviki. The Cossack officers accepted this, as it was intended they should, but demurred a little at the American's desire for speed.

"It will be just as well to go after him tomorrow," was the substance of their remarks.

"Old General Tomorrow has lost more battles for the Russians than Generals January and February ever gained for them," commented Murray.

There was a general silence after this, followed by a laugh at their own expense, and many nods of acquiescence. That point was gained and Murray moved on to the next.

"Does any one here know of the exact location of the Spider's den?" he asked.

It seemed that no one did, but that

there was a Cossack soldier who had been captured by the Bolsheviki of the Red Spider's forces and who had afterward managed to escape. He was immediately sent for and reported shortly, standing at the salute within the doorway, his right hand to his cap in that strained, trembling salute affected by the Russians of all ranks.

Yes, your Honors, he knew the way to the Red Spider's den. Yes, your Honors, it was about seven *versts* away. Yes, your Honors, it was very difficult to reach without being seen. Yes, your Honors, he would be glad to lead them there but if he might be so bold as to say, he would tell your Honors that it would be considerable of a fight.

So far so good. Murray nodded and smiled at the man as he was dismissed. The next thing, the typical American question:

"When do we get going? We should start in half an hour at the latest. That gives men and horses time to eat and rest. All right? Good!"

Turning to Captain Mislaffsky, smiling politely, his voice silky, Kargadoff asked—

"And this joint expedition, who will command it?"

Murray did not get the words but he got the meaning.

"Look here," he interrupted as Mislaffsky began to get steam up for a powerful argument, "the main thing is to nab this Red Spider. Both of you are important and exceedingly capable Cossack officers commanding separate forces. Why not work jointly under my direction, each preserving his own command and looking to me for orders? We did rather well last night with my suggestions, did we not, Ataman?" He turned to Kargadoff. The Russian beamed.

"Wonderfully," he said. "The *Veliki Kniaz*, the Grand Duke Nicholas could have done no better. I, for one, and I am senior in military rank to your Excellency, Prince Mislaffsky, am quite willing to place myself and my men under command of the American."

Mislaffsky nodded.

"Very good," he said. "And I am quite willing as well, although I have the greatest number of men." He smiled at Kargadoff, then added, "Some vodka to toast the new alliance!"

Travers picked up and smiled pleasantly, watching the Cossack orderlies as they brought bottles and glasses and poured out the colorless liquid.

And with due solemnity the toast was drunk, the fiery biting liquor removing the last doubts.

Mislaffsky sent his orders with Kargadoff's orderly, and immediately the men around the table could hear the bustle and stir of nearly three hundred Cossacks preparing for battle. It was a cheerful sound in spite of the fact that a third of them, Kargadoff's men, had been fighting, marching and waiting most of the night. There were guttural commands and orders of non-commissioned officers, the buzz of talk of men waiting loosely in line for the word that brings them to attention.

Murray went to the window and his face glowed at the picture the parade ground presented in the rays of the morning sun.

ACROSS the entire length of the assembly place stretched a long double rank of Cossacks standing at ease, to horse, their lances slung negligently over their arms, their horses' reins in their hands. The single *sotnia* of the Ataman Kargadoff was on the right as befitted the command of the senior subordinate. His men looked very gay in their blue and gold uniforms with the black fur *kubankas* perched rakishly on their heads. To the left stretched the three *sotnias* of the Mislaffsky force, looking no less gay in their scarlet and blue uniforms and their white fur *kubankas*.

There was a sudden sharp command as Murray watched, and the entire force straightened suddenly to stiff and straining attention as a lieutenant, guarded by two soldiers with drawn sabers, brought out a peculiar ebony and silver emblem on a staff looking not unlike the eagles carried by the Roman legions, the precursor of the modern standard. From this ebony and silver battle standard were streamers of horse hair, a reminder of the Mongol nomads when the great Genghis Khan and his lieutenants carried the banner formed of seven streaming yak tails into battle at the head of their hordes.

The *bunchuk*, as it is called, was carried into place in front of the center of the dismounted force, and not until it was lined up in proper position did the single sharp command come again and the straining *sotnias* relax from their position of attention.

Outside the door they heard the trample of horses' hoofs and the officers rose and tightened their sword belts and waited respectfully for Murray to precede them.

"Come on, you big hunk o' cheese," came Travers' whisper. "Shake a leg and strut your stuff!"

The two Americans went out to the horses, followed by the Cossack officers. There was a splendid bay mare standing there, glinting goldenly in the rays of the sun, and Murray's eyes fell on her longingly.

It was Mislaffsky who directed the orderly to bring her up for the tall American, and Murray wasted no time in springing into the saddle, happy in the feel of a real mount under him again after much riding of diminutive Cossack ponies.

A sharp command, and the waiting squadrons stood again to horse. As Murray, followed by the Cossack officers, cantered up to the center of the force a barking roar broke out from the right of the line and went rippling along the ranks, every Cossack shouting at the top of his lungs. It sounded like an immense pack of eager hounds giving tongue. It was the Russian soldier's salute to his commander. Not knowing what else to do, Murray saluted in return as the uproar died down.

At a command the Cossacks sprang into their saddles. Lance pennons were unfurled and made a fluttering wall of color above the heads of the mounted men, the gay bits of cloth whipping and straining their red and green and their white and blue in the early morning breeze.

Then as Murray turned his mount and moved toward the gate of the stockade, the long line swung somehow into column of squads, and the long undulating mass moved out smoothly in the direction of the forest.

"Like the old cavalry days," whispered Murray to Travers. "Doesn't it remind you of the old Third moving down to attack Pancho Villa?"

"It would if it wa'n't for them pigstickers they carry. Yes, suh, suah gives me a powahful kick at that." Travers' eyes, partly from emotion and partly from the generous drafts of vodka he had put away, glistened with the joy of the occasion.

"And, boy, we're liable to get there and fox that bird in time at that," exulted Murray.

But it never does to exult too soon. They had not gone four miles, following the directions of the Cossack soldier who knew the way, when they were forced to stop by the presence of a small tree dropped across the narrow road. Pinned to the trunk was a square of white paper.

Mislaffsky read it, his brows drawn down in puzzlement.

"What does it say?" Murray's voice was impatient. Behind him the suddenly halted column of Cossacks was relaxing.

"It says that if any armed force of more than three men moves past this barrier, exactly twenty minutes later the American lieutenant will be taken out and shot."

"Not so good!"

MURRAY gazed thoughtfully at the bit of paper, then suddenly raised his head. The road they had followed led along the base of a high hill. Above him several hundred feet he could see its bare crest. Sheltered on the far side a column of smoke floated up—thick smoke in a compact column.

"The Red Spider has taken a leaf from the book of the American Indian," remarked Murray, scanning the signal fire closely.

He knew that by throwing green leaves on the small fire and covering it for a few seconds with a saddle blanket a strong cloud of smoke could be sent billowing into the air, repeated at such intervals as the sender desired.

"If we rush that fire the bird up there'll have time to send a signal and beat it before we get within range," he reflected. "If we move out with this mob, the signal will go flying and the poor second looie will get his. Only one thing to do—" he squared his shoulders—"I'll take the guide and go on. I figure it can't be more than three *versts* from here. Meantime you all stand by here. No use monkeying with that bird up there at the fire."

The Russians looked at Murray with very much the same air that one would look at a man about to ride over Niagara Falls in a barrel—a little sad but at the same time curious and interested; a look that said plainly, "We're looking on a man who will be dead in an hour or less."

But Murray paid little heed. Leaning over, he shook hands with Kargadoff, Mislaffsky and Travers, and waved a jaunty goodby to the Cossacks.

At a sharp trot he passed out of sight down the road toward the Red Spider's Den, followed by the guide.

He had scarcely gone a hundred yards when he heard a yell behind him and, looking backward, swore softly to himself.

For there, riding at a full gallop, his Cossack pony lathered with sweat, his face red, his arm waving, his heavy, compact, capable looking figure covered with sweat and dust, came Sergeant Doyle.

Murray pulled up and waited.

"My soul," panted the sergeant as he reined up. "I've had one hell of a time trailin' you around. And I didn't no more than get here in time at that." He paused. "I've got some bad noos for you, old-timer," he finished unhappily.

"That so, Doyle? Cough it up," said Murray imperturbably.

"Well, you see it's like this. You know what I was tellin' you back to camp—'bout them fingerprints?"

"Yeh." Murray nodded grimly.

"Well, they kinda caught up with you—" Doyle mopped his face with a generous sized bandanna. "Yeh, they sure as hell caught up. Hard luck."

"Well, they would in time. What about it?" Murray was perfectly composed.

"Nothin', only old Bellerin' Bill Banton has come up hisself on some kinda inspection trip, seems powerful worried about somethin' and he brung the papers up hisself. He's been promoted brigadier general now."

"Yeh?" Murray waited.

"And he up and sends me out to bring you back under arrest," finished Doyle, uncomfortably.

"Well, isn't that thoughtful of him," remarked Murray easily, staring down the road in the direction of the Red Spider's den. "But unless I miss my guess, he only gets second crack at me. Here come the Bolshie undertakers to take the first whack."

Sergeant Doyle looked in the direction indicated by Murray.

Coming toward them and only about fifty yards away, were three Bolsheviki on small Siberian ponies, carrying carbines on their hips.

"You beat it and beat it quick!" ordered Murray.

"Beat it hell! I'll see this racket through with you, kid!" Doyle was emphatic.

"All right." There was the suspicion of a throb in Murray's voice. "Have you got a gun?"

"My old .45 gat."

"Too big—they'll grab it."

Murray passed his handkerchief over his face and down along his chest as though returning it to his pocket. But as it passed along the buttons of his blouse, a compact lump of blued steel came away with it and as he returned the handkerchief to his pocket the blued steel lump disappeared in the space between the saddle blanket and the pommel of the saddle. His hands dropped to his side naturally as the three men rode up, rifles ready.

Two of them covered the two Americans and the Cossack, and they were directed to dismount. Once dismounted, they searched them thoroughly for weapons, taking Sergeant Doyle's .45 automatic and the Cossack soldier's carbine and saber. Upon Murray they found nothing but a few rounds of cartridges, which they returned to him as harmless.

Again the captives were bidden to mount. Two of the Bolsheviki took the lead, the other one followed behind.

As they started, Murray again brought forth his handkerchief and again passed over his chest and face and then returned it to his pocket. Thereafter he rode with his left arm noticeably farther from his body than his right.

"You ain't so dumb as you look, Murray," commented Doyle, grinning, as Murray winked slowly and solemnly at him.

And they rode on their way, guarded before and behind, headed into they knew not what danger, facing they knew not what sort of death, but with a firm belief in the luck of the American soldier.

CHAPTER VII

THE SMOKE SIGNAL

THEIR Bolshevik captors spoke no word to the three as they moved along the road. The way led them through a heavily wooded section and out again into green meadows, and the road rose steadily toward the hills.

It was a well traveled thoroughfare they followed, with many marks of man and beast and deep cut wagon tracks showing that supplies were hauled for a good sized force.

Murray turned and gazed at the Bolshevik guard bringing up the rear. The man was riding alongside the Cossack soldier. As Murray's eyes fell on him he winked, slowly and gravely, then pointed ahead in the direction they were going and made a peculiarly suggestive gesture, as of one passing a knife across a throat.

"O-ho," Murray reflected, "this lad behind isn't so unfriendly and he's trying to get a warning to us. This'll bear looking into."

He gradually pulled his horse backward until at last he was only a foot or two in front of the Bolshevik guard.

The man leaned forward and whispered to him.

"Youse guys goin' have purty tough time," he whispered. "Me, I been sailor. I been Frisco—ever'where."

"The hell you say," Murray whispered back.

"Yeh. Me spik Englees very good—no? Yes?"

"Absolutely," agreed Murray. "How come you joined up with the Bolshies?"

"These fellers?" The man shrugged his shoulders. "You gotta belong to some kinda gang. Feller all alone by hisself gets kicked by both gangs."

"Well, look here, what kind of a joint is this we're going to?"

"Verree bad place—verree bad." The man's voice sunk to a sepulchral whisper and again he made that motion as of a knife passing over his throat. "I think pretty quick you die, you go there."

"What about this American lieutenant they've got there?"

"They kill 'em tonight. This boss feller, he giv 'em to six o'clock to do somethin' I don't know what, and this young feller lieutenant he say no, so he die. And I don't think he die very queeck."

"Torture?"

"They keel him slow, verree slow. Boss, he got funny li'l feller there knows all about keelin' 'em slow."

"Listen here, fellow—" Murray's face was stern—"you know if you help me free the American officer you'll get a good job with the Americans as interpreter or something?"

"Yeh, mebbe so, and mebbe these fellers Communists come take me away from

Americans and cut my throat queeck, like that."

"You know they aren't going to take you away from the Americans. How about it?"

"Pay me good money, maybe?"

"Good money," assured Murray.

"All right, I help."

The horses had pulled up a long hill and came to a stop, their flanks heaving with the strain. Looking backward, Murray could see the peak of the hill under which rested the Cossack force, and could see a slender column of heavy smoke rising from the watch tower on the hill crest.

As he watched, the column of smoke suddenly disappeared. Curious, he watched for perhaps ten seconds when he saw a solid ball of bluish black smoke rise straight into the air. After five seconds it was followed by another cloud, then there was a longer interval and a third black ball shot upward. The Bolshevik in the rear was watching it as well.

"What's that mean?" asked Murray.

"I think maybe that feller wants somebody come queeck. He got news, maybe good news, maybe bad news. Bimeby feller come ridin' like hell from up there." He pointed in the direction they were headed.

"How long before this fellow will come?"

The Russian shrugged his shoulders.

"*Seechas*," he said vaguely.

The horses having recovered their wind, the little column resumed its march.

"You are our friend?" Murray asked the Russian again.

"Sure, what you think? Me, I been Frisco," said the man a little angrily.

"All right," nodded Murray.

He reached into his blouse and handed something over to Doyle riding beside him, pointing to one of the men ahead. Doyle grinned widely and nodded.

At Murray's pommel was a coil of rope, a lariat, used by the Cossacks as well as by the American cowboy.

Quietly loosening this, Murray, keeping it well below the saddle, straightened it free of knots and lengthened it.

The road was narrow and the two Bolsheviki in the lead were riding close together. Suddenly Murray lifted the loop above his head, swung it quickly and cast.

LIKE a sinuous black snake it whirred through the air and landed, dropping neatly down over the two horsemen in front. With a swift jerk Murray pinned their arms to their sides and dragged the two close together so that their heads nearly bumped with the suddenness of it. Doyle jabbed his heels into his horse's sides at the same instant and leaped forward, with the revolver. Drawing it back, he snapped it first against one struggling head and then the other. The struggling suddenly ceased and the two men fell from their plunging horses.

Securing the horses, Doyle and Murray leaped to the ground and dragged the men to the side of the road and out of sight.

"So far so good," breathed *Murray* through whitened nostrils, the only sign he gave of the strain he had been under.

The former Bolshevik, still mounted and watching, grinned with huge delight. The Cossack orderly was no less pleased.

"Next thing is to get the clothes off these birds and into them ourselves," said Murray.

Murray's loose Russian blouse and baggy trousers fitted him as well as they had fitted their former owner, and the soft leather Russian boots slipped on to his feet without any trouble.

"I hope these here rags ain't filled with cooties," growled Sergeant Doyle, surveying Murray, attired as a Russian peasant. They outfitted themselves completely, even to the carbines and bandoleers of ammunition, putting the loose clothing on over uniforms, rolling their shoes and puttees up in a bundle and attaching them to their saddles.

"What's the program now?" Doyle asked, surveying himself somewhat ruefully and trying to hitch the baggy Russian breeches a little tighter.

"Nab this messenger guy that is coming

in answer to the smoke signal," answered Murray tersely.

He looked up the road they were on, listening carefully while he held up his hand for silence. There was no sound except the faint soughing of the wind in the pine trees.

"All right, we'll mount up and move out. What's your name, old-timer?" he asked the Bolshevist who had befriended them.

"Verree long name in Russki. On the sheep fellers called me Wop," he said proudly.

"All right, Wop—" Murray grinned at Sergeant Doyle—"you ride up forward. When this lad comes along you stop him and talk and we'll slide up and do the dirty work. Got me?"

"Sure," nodded Wop and rode ahead importantly.

Murray and Doyle followed, looking the part of two Bolshevists, and after them came the Cossack soldier, well in the rear where his uniform would not cause comment.

They had not covered more than a hundred yards when Wop held up his hand and reined in. They came to a halt. From far up the road they heard the gallop of a horse's hoofs coming on at a good pace.

Murray felt for his revolver which he had slipped into the pocket of his Russian breeches. Doyle pulled back the breechbolt of his carbine and inserted a shell, closing and locking the unfamiliar gun somewhat clumsily.

The sound of the galloping horse came nearer and nearer until around the bend in the road ahead they saw their man. He was dressed in some sort of khaki uniform and carried a Luger automatic pistol attached to his belt.

"He's a Bolsheviki officer," whispered Sergeant Doyle.

The man came on, paying little heed to the familiar costumes of what he believed to be his own men. He drew up as he reached Wop and asked some question. Wop answered it and asked another in his turn. The Bolshevist officer grinned and pointed behind, then said something and laughed. Wop asked another question. The Bolshevist officer answered it and then started to pick up his reins. He looked up suddenly and found himself staring down the muzzles of a carbine and a revolver held by the two Americans.

The man turned pale, then started to expostulate in Russian.

"Tell him to get off that horse and be quick about it," ordered Murray.

There was something about Murray that spelled danger, and the pale faced and startled looking Russian did as he was bidden. His pistol was taken from him and Murray bound him securely.

Calling the Cossack who had been detailed to accompany them, he gave the prisoner over to his charge. He told Wop to tell the Cossack that he was to take the man back to where the other two prisoners were and to guard the three of them until he was relieved. This was explained and the Cossack soldier departed in high spirits, prodding the Bolshevist in the back.

"We gotta hurry," explained Wop. "The Bolsheviki army comin' down here. That smoke signal say Cossacks got no guard out and are all asleep and it's a fine time to fight. All the gang comin' down like hell."

"Good night," Murray grunted. "All right, into the saddle and let's get the hell outa here."

They mounted swiftly. Far up the mountain side Murray heard the neighing of a horse and the sound as of a multitude of mounted men moving on the march.

SERGEANT DOYLE had promptly seized upon the splendid horse ridden by the Bolshevist officer. Doyle's former mount, a little Cossack pony, galloped along behind them, following as they hurried back toward their men. It was all downhill, bad for horses, and the only consolation was that it was just as bad for the Bolshevists who were coming on.

Taking advantage of every comparatively level piece of road, which they galloped over at full speed, easing their horses down the steep hills and up the small rises, they managed to cover the ground rapidly. Stopping to listen occasionally, they heard nothing behind them, and Murray decided that they had outdistanced their unwitting pursuers.

"But we've got to get there in time to get the Cossacks straightened out, to grab that smoke signal fellow and put him out of the way and to get back and jump these Bolshies before they know what's hit 'em. That's a whale of a lot to have to do in a few split seconds."

"You said a heap," agreed Sergeant Doyle, and bent himself to the task of easing his horse down a gravelly declivity in the road.

As they galloped along, Murray's keen eyes scanned the road for possible positions into which to bring the Cossacks to enable them best to snare the Bolsheviki. As they drew nearer their goal he found one position, then immediately discarded that in favor of a better one farther on. Then he rode, well content.

When they drew near the spot where the sapling had been laid across the road, Murray said—

"Doyle, you beat it on to the Cossacks, tell Kargadoff and Mislaffsky—"

"Tell *which?*"

"Tell the two officers who run the Cossack show to get their men up and ready, and meet Wop and me here in ten minutes or less. Got it?"

"Sure I got it."

Doyle galloped away, while Wop and Murray turned their horses toward the hill before them. It was hard going. Steep and gravelly, the hillside afforded poor footing for the animals and they had to be rested time and again. Finally they struggled up the last of the incline. Above them in a small saddle in the hill they saw the thin column of smoke ascending. Near it stood a squat, fat little Bolsheviki, peering down at them excitedly and beckoning, all innocent of whom he was inviting into his ærie.

Wop rode first and spoke to the man. Murray came down on the fellow without ceremony, tapping him on the side of the head with his pistol before the man knew what had happened.

"No time to waste," he grunted. "Tie this bird up and let's go."

The man was trussed securely and fresh fuel placed on the fire.

"I'll send somebody up as soon as we get down there," said Murray. "Come on."

As he leaned back in the saddle, sliding down the steep hill, he looked off to the right and saw, not over a mile away, the black Bolshevik column twisting and turning along the road, looking like a great snake as it slowly advanced. To the left and below him he could see the Cossacks mounting up and straightening out in column.

"There'll be hell popping around here in a few minutes," he said to himself. He grinned as he hurried his horse down the last few yards to the road.

By the time he had reached this the Cossack forces had straightened out in column, and he looked down the road upon what seemed to be a river of men and horses, surmounted by a forest of lances.

Mislaffsky and Kargadoff were in front. Travers waved him a welcome from behind the two Cossack leaders. Seated beside him on the iron gray horse of the captured Bolshevik officer, was Sergeant Doyle.

Murray wasted no time in explanations. Waving to the Cossacks to follow, he turned back over the route he had just come, and started at a gallop toward the approaching Bolshevist forces.

After him thundered the three hundred men and horses of the Cossack force. It was to be nip and tuck before he could get to the position he had picked out and get his men in place before the Bolsheviki reached the point. He wasted no time in worry, simply forced his horse to greater speed.

The fighting position he had selected was a place where the valley broadened out into a large meadow, bordered by a heavy fringe of trees on the one side and by the sheer stark straight walls of a cliff on the other. It was not more than six hundred yards across as its widest part.

The road over which the enemy must come lay in plain view for some five hundred yards or more.

AS HE entered the valley Murray swerved sharply to his left, where the trees gave shelter, and continued at a gallop. The Cossack force followed, in column of fours, through the heavy fringe of trees parallel to the road which ran along the center of the meadow, some two or three hundred yards out in the open.

As the last of the Cossack force cleared the road and was lost among the trees he threw up his hand in a signal to halt.

"Dismount your men, have them line the edge of the trees, carbines loaded and ready to fire. Let no man fire, under the pain of death, until I give the signal," he ordered Mislaffsky, who promptly saluted and turned to give his commands.

Turning to Kargadoff—

"Keep your men well back, mounted up and ready to charge when I give the word."

Saluting, Kargadoff turned briskly and ordered his *sotnia* back farther among the trees. He took a position from which he could both signal his outfit and see those given by Murray.

Watching the road in the enemy's direction, Murray saw the quick bustle and stir as the Cossacks of Mislaffsky's command dropped from their horses, carbines in hand, saw the led horse holders retire the animals back into concealment, and the dismounted men crawl forward in a long line of skirmishers, coming to rest finally just within the fringe of the trees. There was the snick and rattle of carbines being loaded and then all was silent. Not a sight, not a sound differentiated that place of death from any quiet valley of Siberia.

The last movement had scarcely time to still itself before Murray saw the figures of several mounted men appear suddenly up the road.

There were about five of them, evidently an advance guard, and they rode carelessly, carbines on hip, not bothering to seek out every hidden fold in the ground which might hold an enemy. So sure were they that they would find the Cossack force napping that they took no precautions whatsoever.

They came down the hill and advanced across the meadow in full view and in full range of those two hundred carbines lying in wait. Blissfully unconscious, they rode along, looking neither to the right nor left.

"If only some dumb Cossack don't get nervous and fire a shot and spoil the whole works!" breathed Murray.

"Nice layout," whispered Sergeant Doyle, his eyes glistening and his fingers drumming nervously on the stock of his carbine.

The advance guard of the Bolshevik force was half across the meadow when one or two single mounted men appeared, and then the head of the main column came into view. This was the crucial moment—if that main column would only move down into the meadow, the fight was won. If there was a single false movement on the part of any of the three hundred men in ambush, the Bolsheviki would take alarm, would retire and the day would be lost.

But the advance guard continued to ride forward, the connecting files following. The main force had now reached the bottom of the hill and was moving out into the open. A third of it was now crossing the broad meadow. A few minutes more and a full half of the Red force was spread out along the road in front of the concealed watchers, and in another few minutes the entire force was away from the hill and moving across the open ground.

Mislaffsky stood not fifty yards away, watching Murray like a hawk. The American turned. Meeting Mislaffsky's eyes, he nodded. The Cossack officer raised a whistle to his lips.

The shrill blast startled the men of the Bolshevik column and they looked in the direction of the trees. But leaping from the cover, in a broad sheet of crackling rifle fire, came death in the form of hundreds of vicious, whining bullets.

The roar of rifles, the steady whine and zip of bullets, the rending thuds as steel and lead struck and tore at living flesh, the shouts of fear and the hoarse bellowing of commands, made the peaceful valley into an inferno in a few seconds' time.

The Bolshevik column, marching along so confidently but a minute before, was blasted and rent as though struck by a jagged bolt of lightning. Men and horses were down, wounded men staggered forward a few paces and fell, mounted men turned their mounts helplessly until the animals were shot from under them, animals plunged and reared, adding to the confusion.

CHAPTER VIII

FORWARD TO THE SPIDER'S DEN

IN LESS than three minutes' time fully a third of that force of men and horses were down, wounded or killed. The rest were in a blind panic, seeking flight in any direction but helpless to avoid that leaden hail of death that swept over them so remorselessly.

Suddenly Murray saw hands raised in the air, saw several men waving scraps of white cloth, one of whom seemed to be in command. Without a second's hesitation the American signaled that the firing should cease. This was not easy to accomplish.

Mislaffsky himself obeyed the order unwillingly, and it was several minutes before the last carbine ceased its barking and all was silent in the meadow except the groaning of the wounded, and the threshing about of the mortally stricken horses.

As the victors rose from their hiding places the Bolsheviki threw away their rifles and pistols and many of them dropped abjectly on their knees. It was victory, complete and final.

Calling Mislaffsky, Murray gave him his orders.

"Take the weapons, the horses and the ammunition, reserving one third of each for Kargadoff. Take the unwounded men prisoners and put a guard over them, marching them back to your stockade. Give what aid you can to the injured. Strip all the dead of their clothing and such living as is necessary to make up disguises for fifty Cossacks whom I will take with me immediately. No executions. You'll find a lot of good recruits for your forces in that outfit, or I miss my guess."

Mislaffsky nodded. He was getting accustomed to obeying this imperious American who seemed to know what to do and when to do it.

Calling Kargadoff, Murray told him to get fifty of his best men disguised as Bolshevists, using the breeches and blouses taken from the enemy.

Kargadoff, a little mystified, none the less obeyed and was soon busy selecting fifty men who immediately hurried to where Mislaffsky's outfit were piling up the captured clothing and accouterments.

There was some argument here, Mislaffsky's men not being any too anxious to share up the spoils with Kargadoff's force, but Murray blazed at them in such fashion that they subsided, thankful that they had not been shot.

It took some fifteen minutes to get his force ready. Finally Kargadoff reported that the fifty men were ready and waiting.

At the same moment Mislaffsky came up and saluted.

"I have the honor to report that we have captured 180 prisoners, 171 horses, 290 carbines, 80 pistols and over 8,000 rounds of rifle and pistol ammunition."

"Good work," nodded Murray, "but the job isn't finished yet. Kargadoff and his fifty men go with me, as well as Sergeant Doyle, Travers and this man who joined us called Wop. Mislaffsky, you send your prisoners and your property back under guard, clean up the mess here and follow us to the Red Spider's den in three-quarters of an hour. When you get within view of the place remain concealed and watch for signals. If you don't get any signals come on in anyway and fight your way into the place. Is that clear?"

"Absolutely."

Mislaffsky saluted and turned away. Murray mounted his horse and, with his companions, set off up the road toward the Spider's den once more.

It was then nearly three o'clock in the afternoon.

"We've got to get there and do our stuff before three hours," he told Doyle. "I'll try to bust in with the aid of Wop here, acting as a returned raiding party. If that doesn't go we've got to fight and risk having the lieutenant shot while we do it. Where's Wop? Here, you, Wop, did you tell Captain Mislaffsky to send a man up to keep that fire going?"

"Yes, he send feller up—see?" Wop pointed to the hilltop where the column of smoke rose steadily in the afternoon air.

From somewhere came a Cossack bearing a package—good Russian meat pies. As they rode, Murray and Travers and the rest of them munched away, having forgotten up to the moment that they had not eaten since breakfast.

The road was quiet. There is nothing so oppressively still as certain sections of the Siberian forest, where it seems that not even a bird or a squirrel stirs. As they entered the gloom of the heavy pine and fir trees Doyle edged up to Murray.

"D'you think this here Wop guy is fit to be trusted?"

"Sure, why not? Specially after he's seen the awful drubbing his friends got today."

"I dunno, jest kinda got a hunch he ain't so square shootin'. Keep an eye on that bird, that's all I ask." And with this admonition Doyle dropped back again.

Kargadoff, riding alongside, smoked cigaret after cigaret, the long, slim Russian *papyrus*, mostly paper and long cardboard tube and very little tobacco.

"You are of high rank in your own army?" asked Kargadoff after a long silence in which the horses toiled up one slow rise after another.

Murray looked around, surprised at the question.

The Russian shrugged his shoulders.

"You have military talent of a high order. Never have I seen such fighting as we have seen together these past two days."

"No," returned Murray quietly, "I have not high military rank in my own army."

A bitter frown came into his face as he remembered all he had gone through and all that awaited him when he should return, as inevitably he must, to his command. But he shook off the feeling of depression caused by the thought and, turning in his saddle, watched the column of roughly clad men behind him—roughly clad, but preserving in spite of it a smoothness in their marching and a flexibility in their column that marked trained soldiers.

Doyle drew up again.

"Looka here, Murray, how come you're so all fired interested in savin' this here blame' second looie's skin? What's one second looie more or less anyways? Why not call it a day and head back?"

"I'm not a bit interested in saving the second looie's skin except as a secondary proposition," replied Murray surprisingly.

"What, how—" Doyle's mouth dropped open.

"I'm interested in hamstringing this Red Spider lad, that's what I'm after."

"What you got agin the Red Spider, outside his bein' jest a ornery lowdown Bolshie?"

"What have I got against the Red Spider?" Murray laughed bitterly. "Oh, nothing much," he said lightly. "Hardly anything at all."

Doyle looked at the tall man beside him, stared curiously, sizing him up as if meeting him for the first time.

"What's the Red Spider done to you?" he asked at last.

"I'd just like to get him and get him good, that's all."

"Oh!" Doyle nodded and forbore further questioning.

THE SAT in a low ceilinged, cell-like room hewn out of the solid rock. The only light in the chamber came through the bars in the heavy door, a fitful light at best and gradually growing dimmer as the afternoon waned. The mere fact of the afternoon waning was in itself significant to the man who sat upon the roughly carpentered bunk, his head in his hands, his face haggard, his whole attitude expressive of hopelessness and dejection.

He well knew by the gradually receding light across the stone floor of his cell that it was near to five o'clock.

And this meant that he had an hour to live—perhaps a little more, but the living after the expiration of that hour would be a fearsome thing. To contemplate it made one shudder. Once or twice each day the Dwarf—he knew him by no other name—would come and peer through the bars of his door, his dead eyes betraying no sign of life. He simply stared and went on his way.

The young man on the bunk knew why the Dwarf stared.

For this was the center of the den of the Red Spider, and the Dwarf had the pleasant task of making an end to the victims caught in the net of the Spider.

It must be getting close to six. It was hard to tell by that receding ray of light on the floor. Unconsciously he found himself straining for the first ominous footfalls that would announce the coming of his executioners.

Swift thoughts ran through his head—his sweetheart, his father . . . Queer little pictures . . . the first time he had ever suffered pain—the time the straight young soldier had lifted him tenderly into his arms and carried him home when his horse had bolted, leaving him with a broken shoulder blade and a cracked knee. He wondered whether this business soon to come would be worse than the sharp agony that he had experienced then.

He suddenly raised his head. From far down the corridor he heard the dragging footsteps of the Dwarf, followed by the heavier tread of the armed guards.

Very quietly the second lieutenant rose and smoothed out his bleuse, or what was left of it, praying that he would meet whatever fate was in store for him like a man.

These mountain roads were deceptive things. No sooner had Murray and his accompanying force climbed painfully up one great slope hoping that it would be the last, than they were faced with another.

"Does any one in camp know where you've gone to, by any chance?" Murray asked Doyle as they stopped a moment to breathe the laboring horses.

"Yeh, I dragged that fool kid, Timmons, along until I run into them Cossacks o' yourn. Then I sent him back with word that I caught up with you. Doubt if he ever gets back at that—never did have sense enough to pour water outa a boot with the directions marked on the heel."

"Well, supposing that he did get back, they'll be wondering where in blazes you are with your prisoner," said Murray after they had started forward once more.

"Yeh, mebbe so," agreed Doyle, seemingly little interested.

It was Wop who edged up his horse then.

"We're gettin' purty close to that feller Red Spider's place," he stated.

"About how many minutes now before we sight it?" asked Murray.

"Oh, five minutes. Mebbe I better go ahead and tell him we're comin'?"

Murray looked at Wop speculatively for a moment.

"No," he said quietly, "you'd best stay right with me. You can't tell what's liable to happen." Wop drew back, slightly flustered.

IT WAS Timmons, hastening back to the camp, who spread the word that Sergeant Doyle and Private Murray had been captured by the Cossacks.

Timmons had only slightly embroidered his story, being inordinately fond of having the attention of every one directed upon himself, if only for a moment. But when he saw the marvelous effect that he had created by his report, he began to believe it himself.

For when he returned to camp he found the very crabby looking general still there, the one who had come up from Vladivostok. And he found his detachment commander, first Lieutenant I. C. Perkins, National Army, looking, if anything, more flustered and red about the gills.

It was plain to be seen that the general was mincing no words.

After all, old Bellerin' Bill Banton had not won his name for nothing. His voice carried down to the cook shack and beyond to the latrines.

"What kind of a dopey mob of misbegotten beach combers are you commanding, Mr. Perkins?" the voice boomed, to the huge delight of the whole platoon, listening from afar and hanging on every word. "Why, God bless my soul, Mr. Perkins, I've seen some very pitiful imitations of men masquerading in the uniform of an officer, but never in thirty years' service have I seen an outfit at such loose ends as yours! If your men will obey your orders, Mr. Perkins, you might ask them kindly to fall in, equipped with light packs—not next week, Mr. Perkins, but this minute."

And Perkins issued from the headquarters shack, red faced and seemingly even more knock-kneed than usual. In a shaking falsetto he gave the command to fall in.

Due to the ringing notes of the general's voice the command was heard and obeyed. Forty men lined up after a fashion, rifles, bayonets and belts, mess kits, canteens and ammunition indifferently packed.

The general came out and looked at them, examined them with a jaundiced eye and grunted savagely to himself.

"How far is it to this place where your two men were captured?" he suddenly shot at Perkins.

The lieutenant glanced helplessly at Timmons, who, glorying in the chance to be Johnny-on-the-spot, gave the answer.

"H'm," grunted the general, "too far to catch up with those people on foot. Any horses around here?"

Perkins gave an evasive reply at which the Old Man snorted again, and turned to the ubiquitous Timmons.

Timmons thought there were horses about. Yes, sir, a fellow named Michaeloff could get some. Yes, sir, he would get hold of Michaeloff right away. Yes, sir, and Timmons was on his way.

Somehow, at the end of three-quarters of an hour horses were found for about half the men, and the impatient general set out. Perkins, perched in a Cossack saddle, rolled along beside him like a ship in a heavy sea, his face pale; he was clutching any part of the saddle he could reach.

Following them came the twenty or so men, their rifles slung over their backs, their elbows and knees at all sorts of angles, looking like the cavalry of some bad dream.

"He's a godawful grouchy old piece o' tripe, that there general," some one remarked to Timmons as they rode along.

"Huh, you'd be a godawful grouchy yourself if you was worried like that guy is," replied Timmons.

"How come, worried? What's a general got to be worried about?" The soldier waited for the information, knowing Timmons generally to be fond of relating anything he knew.

But this time it was different. Timmons was close to headquarters for the first time in his life. The responsibility sat heavily upon him. He shook a serious and self-important head.

"That guy's got real worries, take it from me." He rode on with pursed lips, looking stern.

CHAPTER IX

ALONE IN THE SPIDER'S LAIR

"IT'S a tough looking joint," said Murray, staring at the Red Spider's den.

They had come to the top of what proved to be the last rise in the road and were confronted with a broad plateau which sloped gently up to the base of high cliffs, some eight hundred yards distant.

At the base of the cliffs was a heavy log stockade, pierced and loopholed, flanked with log and stone towers and closed securely with a heavy, iron bound gate.

Behind the walls of the stockade could be seen the low roofs of buildings which extended up to the cliff itself, seeming to end there. Between two rows of the buildings, at the end of what appeared to be the main street of the place, they saw a huge square opening into the cliff.

"That must be the Spider's den itself," thought Murray.

The gleam of a bayonet fixed on a rifle could be seen moving slowly back and forth behind the top of the stockade; the place was patrolled by sentries and guarded against surprise.

Far to the right a herd of horses grazed under the care of several mounted men. It was getting on toward late afternoon and the shadows from the tall pines in the rear of Murray's outfit extended far over the plateau and seemed to point to the settlement. Behind them a faint whispering, the soughing of the wind in the tree tops, mourned.

They moved toward the fortress-like place. As they advanced Murray noticed several large dark birds rise from the ground to the left of the road. The birds rose slowly and unwillingly, as though heavy from gorging.

Murray flashed a quick glance at the objects from which they had risen and turned away, a look of disgust on his face.

The stockade would certainly be a hard place to capture without artillery. The nearer he approached the more he realized that it had been laid out by some one who knew his business. The walls were powerful and could resist anything save shell fire. They were cleverly constructed so that the loopholes covered every inch of the ground in front. Even the ground directly beneath the walls, generally a dead spot in this type of fortification, was covered by loopholes placed low in the protruding angles of the towers at each corner of the barricade.

There was a high watch tower within, and Murray caught the gleam of a telescope leveled upon them as they advanced. Wop was riding well up in the advance and he hoped that the man would be recognized. The success or failure of the plan would be decided in the next five minutes. If he could but win across that strip of level, unprotected ground and get through the gates he felt that the problem would be solved, knowing as he did that the greater part of the Bolshevik force was absent.

The sinister, brooding silence of the place worried Murray more than he cared to admit, even to himself. Not a sound came from the stockade, not a wisp of smoke rose from the chimneys of the huts within, not a dog barked, not a soul stirred. Even the lone sentinel whose bayonet he had seen, had disappeared. But he had the sensation of being watched by unfriendly eyes as he advanced, felt hostile glances going through him and his men, and cursed himself for ever having brought them into this trap.

But it was too late to turn back now. Any sign of nervousness and the silent loopholes and embrasures of that sinister fort would belch forth a hail of lead that would obliterate himself and his command.

With Wop in the lead, he advanced steadily, cool and unconcerned, outwardly. Just before coming to the gate they crossed a temporary platform of light logs and saplings which bridged a broad ditch which lay just under the walls. He noted in a single swift glance that even the floor of the ditch could be swept by fire from loopholes set low in the jutting angles of the corner towers.

The two great gates before him swung slowly open, noiselessly and smoothly. It was uncanny, this silent reception. But the gates disclosed that another, an inner stockade still blocked the way to the interior of the fortress. There were no inner gates at this place to correspond with the outer ones, but the road led to the right between the two stockades, and Murray assumed that the second gates were farther along.

The brooding silence of the place was accentuated in this narrow alley between the two high walls made of logs placed upright in the earth and strengthened with cross timbers. To his right he could see the inside of the outer wall, along the top of which ran a covered gallery for the defenders, who could fire either into the space between the two walls, or outside, as they wished. The second and inner wall was loopholed and angled cunningly so as to sweep every inch of the space between the two walls.

MURRAY'S spirits sank lower and lower. There was nothing to do but advance, and he felt that every step was leading him and his men farther into the trap. Certainly they were penned up here like cattle in a butcher's pen, could be slaughtered mercilessly at the will of the silent inhabitants of this eery place.

His disguised Cossacks followed along silently in column of fours. The last of them soon cleared the outer gate. As the last set of fours entered, the great barriers closed as silently and smoothly as they had opened. The last means of escape was cut off.

He turned around and found the eyes of Doyle and Travers fixed upon him somberly. Kargadoff, riding with them, made a single gesture with his outflung hands and raised shoulders—that Russian gesture of resignation to Fate.

Turning to the front again, Murray rounded the corner of a projecting inner tower and found himself before the inner gates. These opened as noiselessly and smoothly as the outer ones. Drawing a deep breath, he rode forward. As his horse cleared the gateway he felt, rather than saw, something taking place behind him. He turned quickly in time to see the gates closing themselves, leaving him alone with Wop.

Just before the final gap closed itself he saw the faces of Doyle and Travers and Kargadoff, all of them pale and staring.

The first person he saw as he turned his eyes away from the gates which had closed so mysteriously and silently behind him, was Lieutenant Vezredonoff.

The thin, white faced officer stood facing him, his opaque blue eyes staring coldly.

With the former Cossack adjutant stood some six Bolsheviki soldiers, formed in line, their rifles at the ready, fingers on triggers.

In one swift look about Murray saw a narrow street lined by log barracks, leading to the great cave entrance. Behind him, on either side of the second gate, were platforms, upon each of which stood several Bolsheviki soldiers, grouped around two machine guns pointed down at the Cossack force below. The jaws of the trap had shut with a vengeance.

"Very glad to see you again, my dear sir," Vezredonoff said purringly.

"Yes? I wish that I could say the pleasure was mutual," Murray retorted quietly.

"Now if you will kindly get down from that horse and come with me, I will be much obliged," Vezredonoff continued.

No one seemed to pay any attention to Wop, who sat on his pony, looking straight to the front. Murray tried to gather from the man's face what part he had in the trick, but his face was a mask.

Dismounting, Murray turned the reins of his horse over to one of the Bolshevik guard. Another of the guards stepped forward, patted his hands over Murray's waistband, looked at the empty holster he carried and stepped back, the search for weapons finished.

Bowing slightly, Vezredonoff led the way toward the large entrance into the cliff; the guard fell in behind Murray and the little procession took up its march toward the cave. As he walked along Murray let no detail of the interior of the stockade escape him. There were very few men about, naturally, the most of them having gone on the expedition against the Cossacks. But the fortress needed few men to defend it. In one place he saw stacks of hay and grain covered with canvas. Looking into the open door of a broad, low building, he saw many carbines lined neatly against the walls and stacked boxes containing bandoleers of ammunition. Evidently the Red Spider was well supplied with arms and ammunition, and in excellent shape to withstand a siege.

Coming to the entrance of the cave, Murray noticed that this large opening could be closed with immense heavy doors, now swung open—doors loopholed for rifle fire. Along the cliff side were other loopholes commanding the interior of the stockade. Low doors to the right and left of the entrance evidently led to galleries cut into the cliff, galleries which could be manned to form a third line of defense in case the first and second walls of the stockade were taken.

Once inside he found that the main entrance to the cave was an enormous hallway which ran back and disappeared into the gloom. Opening from it were many doors. Above the noise of hobnailed boots striking on the rock floor of the cave, he could hear the sound of running water and wondered whether a subterranean stream furnished the water supply of the garrison.

THEY advanced not over ten or twelve yards into the gallery when Vezredonoff turned to the right and opened a door in the wall. This door was larger than the most of them and a sentinel stood before it with a rifle on his shoulder. The Bolsheviki guard remained outside and Murray followed the former Cossack adjutant into a large room well furnished with chairs and rugs and a table. It was lighted by candles hung suspended from the ceiling in a crystal candelabrum.

The place looked luxurious but was chill with the damp coldness of living rock. At the end of the room there was a smaller door covered with curtains.

Beckoning Murray to wait, Vezredonoff stepped through these curtains and soon the murmur of voices came out, muffled by the thick curtains. Then the draperies were pushed aside. Murray, looking up, saw no one. Dropping his gaze, he was hard put to repress a start of astonishment.

For there, staring up at him, stood a dwarf, a man no larger than a twelve year old boy. The creature was hideously repulsive. A heavily ridged forehead, animal-like eyes sunk deep in cavernous sockets, broad flat nose and cruel teeth gave him the appearance, almost, of an ape, an impression strengthened by the excessive length of his arms, which seemed to sweep the ground as he walked.

The creature shambled through the anteroom and disappeared, to the relief of the American.

The murmur of voices continued from the inner room, while Murray reflected upon his position and wondered what was being done to his followers, hoping against hope that Doyle and Travers and the Cossacks had not been harmed.

The discussion in the other room came to an end at last and Vezredonoff appeared again, holding back the curtains, and bade him follow. Vezredonoff departed as Murray entered.

The room into which he was ushered was larger than the anteroom and brilliantly lighted with many candles. An open fire dispelled the chill of the stone walls and cast a pleasant warmth. Deep piled Bokhara and Khiva rugs covered the floor and hung from the walls.

Seated at a broad low table, crouching over a book in which he was making some notes, sat the twisted Ataman Brodensky, the Bolshevist leader known as the Red Spider.

Behind him, standing like statues, their long Russian rifles fixed with bright steel bayonets, were two Bolshevik bodyguards.

"Hello, Vanderleer," said the twisted Russian, glancing at Murray out of peering, nearsighted eyes.

"Hello, Gravnitz," replied Murray easily, and sat down on the nearest chair, turning it about as was his habit and straddling it, his arms resting on the back.

"I expected you'd catch up with me sometime," said the Russian.

"Yes?"

"I suppose you're still angree with me?"

Murray shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course I was verree sorry to have to witness against you at the meelitary trial," the Spider went on, glancing again at his listener with that stealthy inclination of his head.

"Tell me, Gravnitz, who was that little half portion of a man who went out of here a minute or two ago?"

"Oh, heem?" The Russian shrugged his shoulders. "He calls heemself Jaghar, the Prince of Torment. He—ah—acts as sort of a cleaner up of some of the unpleasant matters necessary to this game." The Russian's voice was smooth but his eyes glittered as he spoke.

"You mean he polishes off the prisoners?"

"Call it that."

"How about this American second looey you've got here?"

The Russian frowned.

"He is verree stubborn. I fear I am forced to take extremely harsh measures with heem."

"You haven't done him up yet?" Murray tried to keep his voice indifferent.

"Not yet. Jaghar is on his way there now."

"Then the looey hasn't got many minutes to live?"

The Russian laughed.

"Yes, on the contraree he has many minutes to live. That is a specialty of Jaghar's—letting them live. He is verree useful to me and I let him have his little fun."

"I see." Murray's face showed no sign of any feeling. "What is the program concerning me?"

THE QUESTION was asked casually enough, but this time it was Murray who glanced at the Russian, studying his face intently. He saw that glitter come again into the Spider's eyes and decided that, like the lieutenant, he had but a little while to live. Before the Russian had a chance to reply, Murray leaned forward and stared coldly into the other's face.

"You know, I've had a hard time getting to you," he said.

"Yes?" The Red Spider looked up, a little surprised at the statement, then recovered himself. "Of course, I know of everee move you have made since you landed at Vladivostok on the transport *Logan*," he replied condescendingly.

"Then you knew that I enlisted under an assumed name?"

"Yes."

"And that I run the risk of being tried by court-martial and about ten years in Alcatraz when I'm discovered?"

"Yes."

"And you know, of course, that I am already discovered and that the Army authorities have a warrant out for my arrest?"

"No!" Gravnitz looked surprised. "I did not know that!"

"Yes, that's the fix I'm in—a good deal of it being your fault for having testified falsely against me in the court-martial at Fort Bliss."

The Russian nodded slowly.

"That is true," he admitted, then looked up shrewdly. "But why are you here?" he asked.

"Where else was there to go?"

Gravnitz nodded.

"Yes," he admitted, "you are in a bad way."

"So," continued Murray, "if you need a trained soldier, as capable as most officers and more capable than many, understanding minor and major tactics, topography, field fortification, sanitation, hippology, scouting, marching and fighting, I'm your man."

The Russian remained silent for a long time.

"That," he said, "puts a little deeferent complexion on the matter. But how do I know that you understand the art of war?"

Murray drew a long breath and thought rapidly, then went on.

"I can prove it very quickly," he said.

"You suffered a defeat last night while marching to attack Ataman Kargadoff?"

The Russian looked startled.

"Well, not exactly a defeat, but I conseedered it advisable to withdraw. I do not understand how it happened—the Ataman Kargadoff is not a clever fighter—"

"Because I was commanding the ataman's forces," said Murray quietly.

"You!" For the first time Gravnitz looked straight at the American, then immediately turned away again. "Yes," he said, "but that does not prove so much, a leetle luck perhaps."

"And today," Murray went on steadily, "I defeated and captured the entire force you sent against the Cossacks."

Murray stole a sidelong glance at the Russian. The man was leaning forward, white faced, his lips working strangely.

"Defeated? Captured?" The Russian was incredulous. "No, you will have to tell me a better story than that." He laughed unpleasantly.

"Well, I'll prove it to you," Murray went on steadily. "About three hours ago your man with the smoke signal sent a message that the Cossacks were sprawled about in fine shape to be attacked."

The Russian leaned forward, licking his dry lips.

"Yes, yes," he nodded.

"Then you sent one of your officers, a medium sized man wearing a khaki uniform and riding an iron gray horse, to verify the message."

The Russian nodded, his manner betraying great excitement.

"I captured that man. Behind him, about a mile or two, came your force of nearly three hundred men. I ambushed them in a meadow just this side of the signal place, with some three hundred Cossacks, and cut them to pieces. Gravnitz, you have no men."

The Russian sat back as though stunned, horror in his eyes. He rose suddenly and paced the floor, his talon-like fingers working spasmodically. Then he turned to the guards behind him and shot out an order.

Both men advanced on Murray.

"Wait a minute—don't do anything rash—" the voice of the American was steady and calm—"I had to shoot up and capture your force in order to get here. But once here I bring you the military ability that accomplished this, and bring you, moreover, from fifty to three hundred men who are sworn to follow me—which men are available to form you a new force if you act sensibly."

Gravnitz waved back the soldiers and sank into his chair again, his eyes staring vacantly at Murray.

"What—what proof have I that these men will join my forces?" he asked, his voice trembling.

"As proof I have fifty men with me, whom I can talk over in five minutes if you'll give me an opportunity to speak to them."

The Russian thought this over, then nodded slowly, muttering.

"I'll send Vezredonoff with you, with instructions to shoot you down if there is any treachery," he said finally.

"Good—" Murray rose—"but before we go any further I want that lieutenant released, otherwise the whole deal is off."

The Russian shrugged his shoulders and gave an order to one of the soldiers, who went out.

"He will be released," Gravnitz said absently, still overwhelmed by the news he had heard.

"All right, I'll go talk to my men immediately."

As he reached the door, Murray surreptitiously wiped away the beads of cold sweat that had formed on his brow. It had been a pretty close thing at that.

CHAPTER X

THE RUSH TO THE SPIDER'S DEN

"I THINK, Gravnitz, I'll take a peek at that American officer just to be sure your orders were carried out." Murray turned at the door as they were leaving the room.

"But surely," agreed the Russian.

Leading the way, the Russian spoke to

Vezredonoff, who was waiting in the anteroom, giving him some very explicit directions. Vezredonoff nodded and motioned Murray to follow. The Red Spider turned back, his shoulders bowed, and disappeared behind the curtains of the inner room. He had the appearance of a man thoroughly crushed.

Murray strode into the large central passageway of the cave and followed as Vezredonoff led deeper into the interior. Finally they stopped before a barred door.

The former Cossack adjutant issued a peremptory order and the door was slowly opened. A guard led them into a small cell. In the semi-darkness Murray made out the figure of a man, prone on the narrow bunk.

"Hello, Lieutenant," he called, striking a match.

There was a look of horror in the eyes of the young man as he sat up, staring at Murray in the dim light.

"It's all right, Lieutenant; we just pulled in on you in time," soothed Murray, helping the young man to rise as carefully as a mother handling a child.

"I guess—I'm afraid I fainted," the young officer said. "He started to— Oh, my God!" He put his hands over his eyes and shuddered at the recollection.

Murray handed him his clothes and aided him to dress. With Murray assisting him, they went out and into the main cavern. Vezredonoff followed and gave some directions to a soldier who stood there.

"Nothing doing!" Murray's voice was decisive. "This fellow stays in my sight until I get back. He stays right there by the entrance to the cave where I can see him from the outside."

Vezredonoff started to demur, but seeing the flash in Murray's eyes, he decided to hold his peace. He shrugged his shoulders in assent.

As the two Americans and the Russian reached the entrance of the cave, Murray turned back and whispered to the young lieutenant—

"Stand by this gate and don't let them close it, whatever happens."

The lieutenant looked surprised, but nodded. Murray strode on after the Russian.

As they approached the gate of the inner stockade the American studied it closely; he was looking for the place from which they opened the great portals. At last he found it—on the right hand platform above the entrance, a long lever extending through the floor of the platform, connecting with weights and pulleys near the gates. There were three men there, keeping the machine gun trained on the Cossacks below.

Vezredonoff headed directly for the gates.

"No," objected Murray. "I can talk to them better from up here; no telling how they might act if I got among them with my news."

"Yes," agreed Vezredonoff.

The three men made room for them as they appeared at the top of the steps. Murray glanced swiftly over the layout. The machine gun had its ammunition belt in place. The three men were heavy peasant types, armed to the teeth but stupid and slow thinking. Vezredonoff was directly behind him. There was a railing on both sides of the platform, but none to the rear.

He looked out over the parapet. Down below, disconsolately seated on the ground or standing or walking about, was his detachment.

Doyle looked up as his head appeared over the wall.

"Look here—" Murray's voice was dry and hard—"I've joined the Bolsheviki!"

Travers and Doyle stared at him, astounded. Murray let one eye flutter ever so slightly. They looked less astounded and more interested.

"Yeah," Murray went on, "they made me an attractive offer and I'm taking them up. They want you fellows to join also. It's either that or get yourselves killed. Travers, you savvy their lingo. Go among them and *explain*—" again that eyelid fluttered—"and tell them that everybody who joins must signify by getting up on his horse."

"Suah," said Travers, and went among the Cossacks.

Soon men began to mount up, one after another, until finally every man in the outfit was in the saddle.

"It looks like my outfit was with me." Murray turned to Vezredonoff who was almost at his elbow. "Yes," he went on, "it looks like it."

And then he made one quick step backward, swung around and let drive with his whole strength full at the jaw of the Russian. The man stumbled back and toppled off of the platform.

AS VEZREDONOFF fell, Murray seized the revolver from under his arm, struck the nearest soldier over the head and gave him a violent push over the edge of the platform. He grabbed the next man bodily around the waist and flung him over, and drove at the third who, in his fright, stepped backward and fell.

Quick as thought, Murray swung the barrel of the Maxim around to cover the inside of the stockade; then grasping the long lever, he threw his weight against it and was surprised at the ease in which the heavy gates beneath him swung on their hinges and opened.

"Ride like hell for the cave entrance and grab the Red Spider!" he called down to Travers and Doyle.

It seemed but a second before the two Americans, leading that troop of fifty Cossacks at a hard gallop, swept under him through the gate and drove straight at the entrance to the cave.

There was great excitement there. A shot was fired. Murray saw the gates to the cavern start to close, then hesitate and come to a rest.

"Good for the second looie," he breathed, and watched narrowly for any sign of attack from the rear as the Cossacks charged into the cavern. There seemed no one stirring in the stockade.

From the cavern he heard shots and yells and cries. A woman ran out of the nearest log hut by the gate and then scuttled back in again like a frightened hen. Round the corner of the same house came Wop, a rifle in his hand, waving excitedly.

"Come up here, Wop, and stand guard," shouted Murray.

The sweating Russian came piling up the ladder. Down below, two of the men who had been thrown off the platform began to pick themselves up.

"If one of those men starts anything shoot him," ordered Murray. "We've captured the place."

"Sure, I know."

And Wop leveled his rifle on the men below, shouting at them in their own language. They subsided very quickly, looking timorously up as the American hurried down the steps and rushed, revolver in hand, toward the cavern entrance. As Murray ran he saw the body of Vezredonoff, his neck twisted back at an impossible angle.

Before he reached the cavern entrance he saw several Cossacks issue with Bolshevik prisoners. Once inside he found the lieutenant, Travers and Doyle directing affairs.

"Where's the Red Spider?" shouted Murray. They all looked blank.

Racing into the anteroom where he had left the Spider, Murray pushed the curtains aside and leaped into the larger room behind.

It was empty. Near the fireplace, the small door he had noticed was wide open.

Without a single backward glance Murray hurried through it.

He found himself following a low vaulted passage that suddenly began to climb upward. It was dark and Murray stumbled along, making what speed he could, feeling for both walls with his hands; the passage was exceedingly narrow.

Suddenly his foot struck against a step and he narrowly saved himself from a spill. Upward he climbed, the passageway twisting and turning like the track of a snake.

Hurrying along blindly, both hands outstretched, it was with a sudden gasp of surprise that he collided with a human body. His gasp was succeeded quickly by a grunt of pain as long powerful arms came out of the darkness and wrapped themselves around him like the tentacles of an octopus, closing in on his ribs with such force that he struggled for breath.

With his free right hand—in which he held the revolver—he struck blindly in the darkness. But the slow grip that was squeezing the life out of him increased rather than diminished.

Then he felt the clamp of a powerful pair of jaws on his shoulder and nearly screamed with the agony of it as the teeth bit in, deeper and deeper.

Madly and desperately he struck again and again at the head boring in below his neck, but to no effect. Just when it seemed that he must faint with the pain, he bethought him of the business end of the revolver, and shifting it to his free hand, found the trigger and pressed the muzzle against the head that was fastened to him like a leech. There was a roar, followed by a groan, and something warm and wet splashed against his cheek.

The terrible teeth loosed their grip on his shoulder muscles and the powerful arms relaxed their crushing pressure and fell away from him. He heard something fall heavily, like an ox that has been pole-axed, and stood for a second breathing hard, trying to recover his wind.

In a moment he struck a match and looked down at his feet.

As he knew, it was the body of the dwarf, Jaghar, the self-styled Prince of Torment. Shuddering at the sight of the warped form, as hideous in death as it had been in life, Murray went on.

Climbing upward until it seemed his laboring lungs would burst, he saw daylight ahead at last and struggled up into the open air. From where he was he judged himself to be at the top of the cliff. But where was the Red Spider?

It was after sunset and the dusk of evening was beginning to settle over the countryside. The top of the cliff was level and smooth—a plateau, grass grown and verdant.

AS HE looked about him, he suddenly heard a shot and a bullet whistled uncomfortably close to his head. He ducked into the small depression whence rose the last few steps of the passage into the cliff and gazed long and searchingly in the direction from which the shot had come. His eyes fastened upon a small clump of bushes not over forty feet away.

Breaking off a branch of the brush above him, Murray placed his fur hat on its tip and raised it slowly, watching the clump of bushes meanwhile. There was a stir and a movement to the right of the clump he suspected, and another shot rang out.

This shot was followed by an echo—the bark of Murray's gun—and a dark form rose in the bushes and fell, rolling out into the open in plain view.

"Hope I didn't kill him," murmured the American, and ran to the fallen man.

It was the Red Spider, with blood seeping from a long cut in his head where the bullet had creased him.

It was but a second's work to lift the Russian to his shoulder after the fashion illustrated in the "Manual of First Aid". And with his burden, Murray strode back to the passage into the cliff and entered.

He arrived at last, considerably winded, in the room where he had held his interview with the Spider.

Laying the still unconscious man on a settle, he hurried out into the passage and found that his Cossacks were celebrating the victory by breaking open a store of vodka they had found. Travers was giving them all the assistance in his power. Doyle was holding himself aloof, powerless to do anything, lacking authority. Kargadoff was asleep, stretched out on a wolfskin in the anteroom of the Red Spider's office. The lieutenant, after an attack of nausea, was stretched out, pale and with closed eyes, on two chairs.

There were no guards posted, the gates were wide open, the stockade was being looted as fast as the Cossacks could run from house to house. The screams of a woman precipitated Murray into action.

"Here, you—" he kicked Kargadoff awake—"get up and assemble your men outside the cave—quick!"

Kargadoff rose and saluted, half asleep still, and went out.

"Travers, you misguided hunk of cheese, lay off the liquor until we get straightened out. Go in that room and guard the guy that's stretched out there and don't let him get away."

"Suah, old-timuh, s'besht thing I do—gua'd folks." And Travers ambled away, pleased with his detail.

The Cossacks, some of them reeling happily, were being kicked and cuffed into place by their chief.

"Doyle, take a gang of these babies and man the guard posts on the walls; chase out any Bolsheviki you find and send them up here under guard."

Doyle, glad to have some authority once more, walked along the line of somewhat shaky Cossacks, counted off twenty men, pointed in the direction he was going and moved out, followed by the men. The holiday air vanished from the stockade as if by magic.

A few timorous women appeared and threw themselves on the mercy of Murray, who put a guard over them.

"Who do you think I found down there?" Doyle asked, when he returned Then, in answer to his own question, "Michaeloff. Too bad one of my Cossacks put a bullet through him before I could stop him."

Doyle, the thorough, had even posted a man in the watch tower. It was this man who sang out presently.

"The rest of the force is in sight," announced Kargadoff.

"Which force?" asked Murray, alert.

"Mislaffsky's men," stated Kargadoff, and Murray relaxed.

There was another call from the watch tower.

"*Amerikanski!*" Murray understood that one word.

"He says that there are American soldiers with them," translated Kargadoff.

Murray received this news with a worried frown.

With guard posts manned, and a guard of honor of some twenty mounted Cossacks lined up inside the second gates, the remainder of the outfit was welcomed. They rode in, cheering wildly.

Mislaffsky insisted on throwing his arms around Murray and kissing him in the impetuous Russian fashion. Scarcely had Murray recovered from this when the end of the column drew in sight and with a sinking of the heart he saw his fat little commanding officer, Lieutenant I. C. Perkins, his pudgy legs wrapped around a saddle, wildly pointing at him.

With Perkins was a heavyset, square shouldered, exceedingly grouchy looking officer wearing the bright new stars of a brigadier general.

"THERE he is—there's the man. Come to attention, Murray, don't you know the respect due an officer!" The shrill voice of the fat lieutenant sounded like the buzzing of a gnat in all that riot.

"Never mind that," grunted the general and looked away.

Suddenly he sighted something that affected him powerfully, for when Murray looked again, he saw the old man with his arms around the young officer whom he had rescued.

"My son, my son!" The hard boiled old general was half sobbing and the young fellow's eyes were full of tears as father and son embraced.

"My Lord, it's the general's son I've rescued!" said Murray softly.

But the Cossacks were not to be stilled. Mislaffsky had leaped upon a barrel top and was shouting in Russian. Cheer after cheer went up, until the stockade trembled with the steady, deep chested roar of nearly three hundred men.

All eyes were on Murray. Mislaffsky approached him, accompanied by several stout Cossacks, and before he could protest, he was hoisted high on their shoulders and the wild mob of shaggy Cossacks went madder still.

"Ataman! Ataman! Ataman!" they shouted in an ever deepening chorus, until suddenly the sharp notes of a bugle split the air.

Murray was set on the ground again. The Cossacks ran to their horses and formed in line. Suddenly they were forming a huge, three sided square in the center of which stood Murray. A long roar traveled the length of the line. All the lances dipped to him as if with a single motion. Three men, a junior officer and two sergeants with drawn swords, trotted gravely up with the *bunchuk*—the Cossack standard—and, dismounting, knelt in front of Murray and handed him the symbol.

Mislaffsky and Kargadoff came up, stiffly at salute.

"We have the honor to inform you that you have been elected Ataman of the Cossacks of the Nikolsk," they reported gravely.

"Fine! Fine! Tell the men to break out some vodka," said Murray, looking askance at the general, standing with his son, taking it all in.

Without a single backward glance at the cheering Cossacks breaking their formation to seek the drinks they had been promised, Murray hurried to the room where he had left Travers on guard over the Red Spider. Travers was half asleep, but had managed to keep a strangle hold on the Russian's ankle.

The Red Spider had recovered consciousness.

On the table Murray found pen and ink and paper.

"Here, you, Gravnitz, write the dope on that phony evidence you gave at my court-martial as I dictate," he ordered.

The Bolshevist commander submissively did as he was told.

After he had finished it, Murray sent Travers out to find the general and his son. In a few minutes they came in, followed by the belligerent looking Lieutenant I. C. Perkins.

"General—" Murray looked him straight in the eye—"will you please read that over and witness this fellow's signature?"

The general put on his glasses, read the paper through and looked up, startled, staring from the Russian to the American soldier.

"Why, bless my soul," he said, "I was on the court that tried you."

"Yes, sir," agreed Murray.

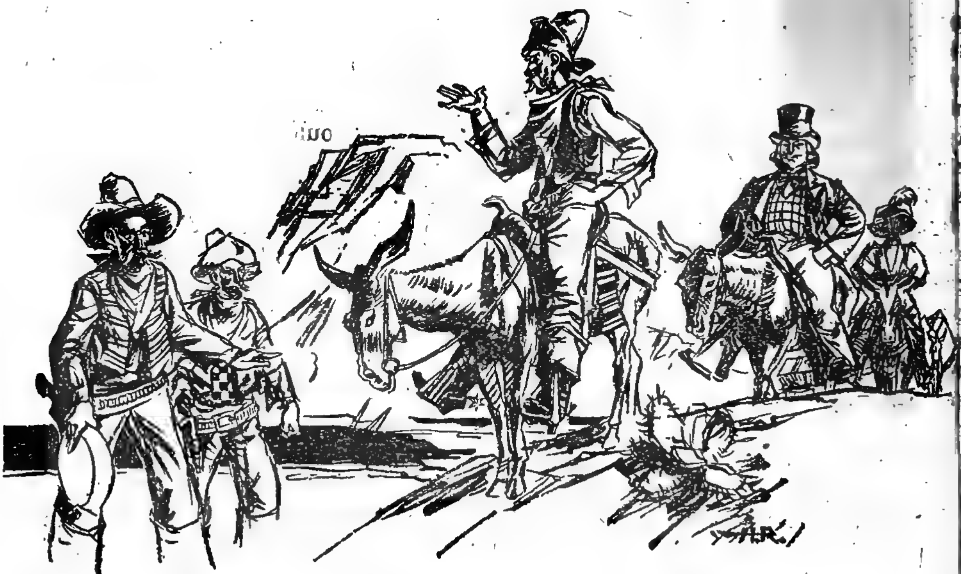
"Why, that was a terrible miscarriage of justice, my boy. Of course I'll sign it." And he put pen to the paper, asking his son to do likewise.

"Now, Vanderleer—" the general rose and looked sternly at him—"one of my unpleasant duties is to see that you are put under arrest and sent back to the States in irons for re-enlisting under a false name after having been dishonorably discharged—"

"Pardon me, General," Lieutenant I. C. Perkins' reedy voice chimed in, "I'm very glad to hear that. I knew from the start that there was something wrong with this man—he never showed the proper respect due an officer."

"As I was saying—" the general glared at Perkins and that worthy suddenly shut up like a clam—"as I was saying before being interrupted by a damn' ninety-day wonder that doesn't know the respect due a general, a general officer in the field has great latitude in routine matters of this nature. Therefore I am cabling to the States to forward a commission as captain to former Sergeant Vanderleer, as I wish to place him immediately on duty in the Intelligence section as Liaison Officer with our Cossack Allies."

"Fair enough," agreed Sergeant Doyle when he heard the news a few minutes later. "But believe me, that was an awful lotta fuss and flurry to make over a shavetail, even if he is a general's son. And now, o' course, I draw down the detail of taking this Red Spider guy to Vladivostok for trial. No matter what happens, I draw down extra duty outa it."



The Hand of PIPEROCK PROVIDENCE

that gave Magpie Simpkins the secret formula of the marvelous Bushwa medicine

By W. C. TUTTLE

"I'D LIKE to be somethin' in the world," says Dirty Shirt Jones, as he adjusts his shoulder blades to fit the contour of a boulder and hunches his pants seat to an easy position in the gravel. "I want to do somethin' big, Ike. I'm above the average in intelligence—in Yaller Rock County—and there's somethin' inside me that makes me kinda disgusted with m' present position in life."

"Try some bakin' sody," says I. "You've been eatin' too much fried grub."

"It ain't m' stummick," says he. "I know ambition from indigestion."

I look at him and wonder if he does. Dirty ain't very big, with kind of a skinny face, crooked nose, some well meanin' hair—which never had a chance to show its natural color—and one eye which don't stay still long enough to be of any help to the other. It's the most independent eye I ever seen. No matter what Dirty is lookin' at with the other eye, this'n goes jigglin' all around, and all to onct it stops, plumb out of line with the other, and stares at you as much as to say, "How's that for a dead stop?"

Kinda makes you think you ought to

applaud. But don't never do it. Dirty is tender hearted about that trick eye. He says there's been more men killed over that eye than there ever has over cattle rustlin'. And, drunk or sober, he's shore deadly with a six-gun.

Me and Dirty and Magpie Simpkins have been workin' all summer on a placer proposition, and we jist got bedrock enough stripped to make a cleanup, when along comes Old Man Cloudburst and wipes out a month's work. We needed plenty more supplies, a lot of powder and some machinery, if we ever expected to get rich; so we took the three thousand dollars' worth of gold dust and nuggets which we had already cleaned up and sent Magpie to Mica to buy what we needed. Magpie wanted to go to Piperock, but we knew Magpie too well to ever let him go to Piperock with three thousand dollars. We sent him over the divide, ridin' a burro, him a-holdin' up his long legs to keep from hookin' 'em around a boulder, while we kept on workin'.

I've been a pardner of Magpie Simpkins for years, wonderin' every day jist why I stick to that long legged, sad faced galoot, with the long, weary lookin' mustache and queer ideas. Every day Magpie gets a bright idea, but when you get to figurin' on 'em, you'll find plenty things missin'. Always hankerin' to elevate the human race, and if all the catastrophes he's ingineered was put end to end, you'd have to put floats on both ends to keep 'em out of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

"I dunno whether we was bright or not, when we let Magpie go off across the hill with that three thousand," sighs Dirty.

"He's plenty honest," says I.

"Yea-a-ah, he's honest, but—"

"He didn't go to Piperock. Over in Mica, he'll take a few drinks, buy what we need, sock the rest in the bank and come back over the hill. I'd trust him with my life."

"So would I—with your life. Mebbe it's all right. That there thousand dollars would keep me all winter."

"Eight hundred for whisky and two hundred for the comforts of life."

"I can be comfortable on less'n two hundred, Ike. If anythin' happens to my share of that dough, I'll have to. I wish I had a million dollars jist onct."

"What would you do with a million?" I asks.

"Well, I'd git me a new hat, couple pair of red socks and, by golly, I'd git me a pair of overalls that fit. I never did have a pair that fit me. And then I'd play a little poker, and if I didn't git stuck too bad, I'd git me a—a—"

Dirty stopped spendin' a million, slid upright beside the boulder, his loose eye doin' a hula dance. I got up off m' shoulder blades and took a look. It was shore worth the effort.

In the lead of the caravan was Magpie Simpkins, danglin' along on a yaller burro. Behind him is a skinny cayuse, and on this cayuse is a big geezer, wearin' a long black coat, white collar and a plug hat. He's got a wide open face, like a Hereford, and his hair is so long it piles up on his shoulders.

Behind him, ridin' on a mule, is a fat woman, her plumed hat jolted down over her left eye. She is hangin' to the saddle with both hands, lookin' out at a cruel world through sad eyes, her red lips registering a cross between a "I want to cry, or I want to spit" expression.

Behind her comes three more mules, piled high with stuff. Me and Dirty climbed up out of the wash and looked 'em over. Magpie gives us plenty time to fill our eyes with the spectacle. The fat lady shoves her hat to the back of her head, sighs deep-like and says—

"And may God deliver me from ever slidin' down the Rocky Mountains on a mule again."

"Amen, my dear," rumbles the big man.

Dirty shoves his hands down in his pockets and turns to Magpie.

"Well," says he, "go ahead and prove an alibi."

"Gentlemen," says Magpie, "you are lookin' upon Simpkins and Bunyan, the originators and dispensers of Doctor Bunyan's Indian Bushwa, guaranteed to cure anythin' from Nome to Nogales. Your health depends on us. We are in business for your health. If you've got spots before your eyes, dizziness, dispepsy, achin' j'ints, moles, ulcerated teeth, ringbone, spavin, corns, bunions or ingrown toenails—we come to make you whole."

"Doc!" shrieks the female. "Look at that man's eye!"

"Madam," says Dirty Shirt, "that'll be about all out of you."

"It—it's loose, Doc."

Dirty's right hand sneaks back toward his gun.

"Answer the lady, Doc," he says kinda soft-like.

"My man," says the Doc, kinda heavin' a sigh, "please excuse the lady. She has never ridden a mule before, and the—er—undue effort—uh—touch of sun, you understand."

"Yea-a-ah," says Dirty. "I s'pose so."

Magpie helped 'em unload, while me and Dirty sets there on our heels and looks on. There ain't a stick of dynamite, no machinery—nothin', except a hell of a lot of valises, boxes and bales. Magpie herds 'em into our little two-by-four cabin and then comes out to us, a big grin on his face.

"Boys," says he, "opportunity has knocked at our door."

Me and Dirty don't say nothin'. One or two extra knocks don't mean anythin' to me and him.

"And opportunity only comes once in a lifetime," adds Magpie. "For many a year we have been delvers in the dirt. We've wrested a livin' from the bosom of the earth by the sweat of our brows. A couple days ago, over in Mica, opportunity came my way. For our measly three thousand dollars I have annexed a half interest in Doctor Rushford Maxmillan Bunyan, P. F. A. D.

"This here half interest means that we three own one-sixth apiece of this here aggregation, which will tour the world, bringin' joy, happiness and health, and incidentally pay us more than we could ever hope to dig out of old Plenty Stone Creek if we lived to be a thousand years old and dug every day. The doctor own the secret formula for the marvelo Bushwa, but we now own one hal of it.

"His wife, Madam Lillian Elvington Bergerac, is the world's most famo snake charmer, ownin' and operatin' t venomous cobras and four bone crushin pythons from the South American jungles These here reptiles is worth more than sh cares to name, and we own half of 'e We'll hire Runnin' Wolf and his squaw travel with us and do the aborigina dances. We'll advertise Dirty Shirt the greatest revolver shot in the world and I don't know jist yet what we wil with Ike."

"If you don't mind," says I, "I choose m' own weapons and do a goo job. I'll also leave a note, statin' wh done it, so the law won't bother any you."

"You—you spent all the money?" as Dirty, his eye jigglin'.

"And lucky to get it at that price. Ha interest in the show cost a thousand. On half of the secret formula cost a thousan and it's worth millions. Them snakes ar worth a thousand apiece, and we ow three of 'em for a thousand. I tell you gents, we're lucky. We'll travel all ov the world and—"

"Jist why did the fat plug hatter s you half interest?" I asks.

"It was like this, Ike. The Govern ment took his Injuns away from hi 'cause he let 'em drink too much Bushw His champion pistol shot issued a chal lenge to anybody in Mica, and Yalle stone Brown thought it was a challeng to do gun fightin'. They buried th champion, and the sheriff attached th show for the funeral expenses."

"Yallerstone Brown ain't so danged fa with a gun," says Dirty Shirt.

"And the Bushwa sells for a dollar bottle," says Magpie. "It costs fifteen cents to make, includin' the bottle. Every bottle sold pays us each fourteen and one-sixth cents. Suppose we sell a thou sand bottles in a night? Jist suppose w do. That means fifty-one dollars and—"

"What do I git for shootin'?" asks Dirty Shirt.

"That'll have to be arranged. You'll et a salary."

"What do I git?" I asks.

"You'll have to do somethin' to git a ary, Ike."

"I'll sell you my share for jist what it ost."

"No, you won't, Ike; I'm goin' to make ou rich in spite of yourself. We'll all be ch and famous inside a year, I tell you."

"We'll be dead and buried," says I, and I'm no damned pessimist, either."

LIKE they do in a lot of stories, I'm goin' to do a jump. There's no use of tellin' you how me and Dirty Shirt slept out in the ain, lettin' the fat doctor and his fat wife ave our bunks, nor how we got back to iperock without enough money to buy a rink. I stood Buck Masterson off for a allon, and when I got back to normal I und that Magpie had bought six wolves om Dug Out Dulin—three grown wolves nd three pups.

They was to be used as atmosphere in he show, and I was the keeper. There as Freddy Faith, Harry Hope and larice Charity. The pups belonged to he latter. Tamed? Of course, they asn't tamed. Jist three long geared lobo olves, with a hankerin' to git even with umanity. I didn't blame 'em. Magpie aid they'd go well with Easterners. Fit n with Injun dances, et cettery. Magpie ade a deal with Runnin' Wolf and his quaw, Tin Can Tilly, to do a war dance.

Magpie comes to me and says—

"If you're sober enough to understand hings, we open in Paradise."

"If you has the sense of a drunken man, ou'd know better," says I.

You see, this Yaller Horse County has lways harbored a three cornered feud. There's Piperock, Paradise and Yaller Horse towns, plumb ready to heave lead t each other at any time. Old Testament Tilton, our preacher, shore hit the nail n the head when he said—

"If everybody in Paradise and Yaller Horse was to fall dead all to onct, it wouldn't make a danged bit of bookkeepin' for Saint Peter."

Piperock is jist a lot of decent folks, tryin' to get along. We're progressive, kind, patient, et cettery. Why, we'd even help an enemy. I can remember one time when Yaller Horse had trouble with Paradise. Now, we don't like Yaller Horse. In fact, we detest 'em. But when Yaller Horse comes to us and says they've jist about made up their mind to wipe Paradise off the map, we offered to help 'em. That's the kind of folks we are.

I had a talk with Dirty Shirt Jones and he's all hopped up.

"I've allus wanted to be somethin'," says he. "Now I'm champion revolver shot of the whole danged world."

"And we open our show in Paradise," says I. "If I was you, I'd hide m' light under a bushel, until we git away from Yaller Rock County."

"I'll live up to m' reputation, Ike, don'tcha forget it."

It didn't take me long to find out that Doctor Bunyan was an old rum hound, and that Madam Lillian Elvington de Bergerac wasn't so far behind him. But Magpie didn't seem to mind. He's so busy and so danged important that morals don't mean any more to him than fleas to a coyote. He sends to Mica and gets the bills all printed in red letters.

The old Doc and his wife go down to Paradise to arrange to have the show down there. I tried to talk him out of it. It's too much like settin' on an open keg of powder and tryin' to enjoy a smoke. Magpie won't listen to me. He says we'll sell a bottle of Bushwa to every man, woman and child in Yaller Rock County.

All I've got to do is link them three wolves on a rope and set out in front of the doctor with 'em. I'm the wolf man, I am—and I've hated 'em from the first. The pups don't figure in on it, except we own 'em. Dirty is spendin' all his time shootin' at tin cans, and Runnin' Wolf and his squaw are doin' war dances around their wickiup down in the creek.

Them printed bills look like a death warrant to me. They read:

Simpkins and Bunyan *Presents*
A Night in the West
Featuring
Madam Lillian de Bergerac
World's Greatest Snake Charmer.
Egbert Willard Jones
World Champion Revolver Shot.
Isaac Beiling Harper
The Wolf Man.
AND
DOCTOR BUNYAN, P. F. A. D.
Discoverer of
BUNYAN'S INDIAN BUSHWA.
Admission One Dollar.

I wondered what Paradise and Yaller Horse will say when they find that Dirty Shirt's real name is Egbert Willard Jones. The doctor told Magpie not to mention the Injuns, on account of the Government.

I asked Magpie what them initials after the doctor's name meant, and he said it was People's Friend and Adversary of Disease. He told me that the doctor had at least a thousand bottles of the Bushwa all ready for sale, and he figured we'd clean up close to two thousand the first night, includin' the dollar admission. Just where he figured to get a thousand people in that old hall in Paradise was more than I could see.

Of course, we kept all this a secret. Paradise and Yaller Horse didn't know anythin' about us ownin' the show. The Doc thought it might be better to keep quiet about it. He said his name was so well known that if the folks around there knowed he was abroad in the land, they'd swamp him with orders and delay the show. Sounded sensible—to Magpie and Dirty Shirt. Me, bein' only the wolf man, I didn't have anythin' to say about it. I was to get fifty a month and my expenses, and a sixth of the profits.

Doctor Bunyan and his snake charmin' wife didn't come back the same day they went to Paradise, and I wondered what was the matter, but Magpie told me it would take time to arrange for the show. They didn't come back the next day, but Magpie said it was prob'ly because they went over to Yaller Horse to kinda let th folks see what they looked like.

Madam Lillian Elvington de Berger kept her six snakes in separate basket and she shore warned us to keep awa She said we'd die in jist thirty seconds them cobras bit us, and that the oth snakes would squeeze us to death in less that. Madam, as Doc called her, had hoarse voice and smelled of plenty pe fume. I asked her if she ever got bit, an she said she did once—when she marrie Doc Bunyan.

Well, they had been gone two days, an Magpie decided it was time to post a fe of them bills. That long complected jigger's chest swelled six inches every tim he seen his name in print.

"Simpkins and Bunyan," says he "Me first—Doc second. The world w hear of me. We'll have somethin' for o old age, Ike."

"We will," says I. "Bullet marks."

"Do you know what a pessimist i Ike?"

"I shore do. He's a optimist who h been there."

Anyway, Magpie went ahead and posted his bills around Piperock, and ol Dirty Shirt, wearin' some fringed buckskin pants, a red shirt and the biggest h he could find, follers him around an reads every danged bill. He's two-third drunk and so ignorant that he likes th name of Egbert Willard. And th "World Champion Revolver Shot" shor hits him right. He even growls at m who can beat him on the draw every tim

THEN cometh Yuma Yate Tombstone Todd and Dog R Davidson, three of the toughe old rattlers that ever made track in the sand. They represent Yaller Horse. I seen 'em pile off their horse and stand around one of them bills poste on the side of Buck Masterson's saloon After awhile I seen Tombstone hitch hi gun around on his thigh, yank his ha down over his eyes and look around.

Here comes Magpie up the stree trailed at a short distance by Egbert

Willard Jones, and the Yaller Horse trio meet him in front of Wick Smith's store.

"Gentlemen!" says Magpie.

"Depends on circumstances," says Tombstone.

There's another of them red printed bills on the front of the store, and Tombstone points his trigger finger at it.

"What does that there thing mean, Magpie?" he asks.

Magpie swells up some more inches.

"Just what she says, gents. Simpkins and Bunyan presents—"

"Desist a minute," says Yuma. "We can read. Does this here Bunyan person happen to be a big jigger with long hair and a hard hat?"

"Yeah, that's the wonder worker, Yuma."

"You workin' for him?" asks Dog Rib.

"We own half of his outfit."

"Who's we?"

"Me and Dirty Shirt and Ike."

Tombstone squints sideways at Dirty Shirt.

"Are you Egbert Willard Jones?"

"Yeah," says Dirty Shirt, "and if any of your snake huntin' community don't think I'm accordin' to the epitaph—cut your rattles loose and come a-strikin'."

"My Gawd!" breathes Yuma. "Egbert."

And just then Hair Oil Heppner, Hip Shot Harris and Hank Padden ride in from Paradise. If there was an Independent Order of Horsethieves, them three would be Grand Exalted Brand Obliterators. They slide off their broncs, drop the reins and shuffle over to us. Hair Oil has one of them bills in his hands.

"The question is this," says Tombstone, ignorin' the new arrivals. "When and how did you three buy into this here Bunyan proposition?"

"I'd crave that there same information," says Hair Oil.

"Swaller your cravin', feller," says Yuma. "We're talkin' business, and we don't hanker for an outsider to horn in."

"For three thousand dollars, we bought one-half interest," says Magpie.

"Yea-a-a-ah?" drawls Yuma. "Well, let me tell you somethin', Simpkins. We are here from Yaller Horse to git an' accept one-half interest in this here Bushwa show. We purchased said one-half interest and—"

"Oh, didja now?" queries Hair Oil. "Lemme tell you somethin', Yuma Yates. Me and Hip Shot and Hank done bought and paid for one-half interest in Doctor Bunyan and all he contains. That there show is hereby from Paradise. We've come to move said appurtenances down there, where we arrange to tower the civilized world. This here red ink bill ain't worth nothin'. We ignores it plumb and complete. Where's the Doc?"

"What are these uncivilized jiggers talkin' about, Magpie?" asks Dirty Shirt.

"The Doc," says Magpie, "ain't come back from Paradise."

"He left there yesterday," says Hank Padden.

"And he left Yaller Horse day before yesterday," says Yuma. "You say you paid three thousand dollars?"

Magpie nods.

"We paid a thousand," says Yuma.

"Our donation was twelve hundred," says Hank Padden.

"We bought first," says Magpie.

"And we hold what we buy," nods Dirty Shirt.

"You never knowed Yaller Horse to squander money, didja?" asks Tombstone.

"And," says Hair Oil, "folks from Paradise usually gits value received."

Mebbe Dirty Shirt saw his title fadin' away and it made him mad. Anyway, he reached out and hit Tombstone Todd on the nose. Tombstone has got one of the biggest noses you ever seen, and it kinda went *squirsh* when Dirty hit it.

There wasn't anythin' to be done, so I choosed me Yuma Yates, and after I bounced his head on the sidewalk a couple times, I took Hair Oil Heppner to my bosom, as you might say. Hair Oil was a willin' worker, and he hit me so hard that I went plumb back to my old home in New Mexico and sat in on a family reunion. The folks were all well. I had a lotta nephews and nieces I never seen before, and my brothers all had big noses, like Tombstone had.

There was a big fat woman there, who insisted on kissin' me goodby, and she finally made it. My gosh, I never heard such a smack, and I woke up, tryin' to pick splinters out of my upper lip.

"You better quit lookin' up, you damn' fool," says Dirty Shirt. "That last bullet almost removed your nose."

I finds myself settin' down behind a section of that sidewalk, and near me is Dirty Shirt. His upper lip is swelled up to the end of his nose, one eye is swelled shut, and he's stuffin' shells in his six-gun.

"How's the champion, Egbert?" I asks, pickin' more splinters.

"Not so damn' awful good, Isaac Beiling. M' good eye is dark, and the other one never was much good, except to make remarks about. I had a fair, open shot at Tombstone Todd as he pulled out for home, but I led him too far and shot an ear off his bronc."

"Where's Magpie?"

"He's up in the Mint Hall, shootin' through a winder."

Whap! A bullet skidded off the side of the wall and it put the nicest crease in Dirty's hair you ever seen. He kinda jerks, places the gun in his lap, and says to me—

"I am Egbert Willard Jones, revolver champion of the world, I am."

And before I can think of anythin' to say, he starts singin':

"Swee-e-e-et bunch of daisie-e-e-e-es, fresh from
the de-e-e-ell,
Kiss me once, swee-e-e-etheart, daisies won't
te-e-e-ell."

There's quite a lot more shootin', but I ain't interested. I'm not a champion shot. I'm the wolf man. After while Magpie comes along. He's got the bridge of his long nose skinned, one eye blacked and a bullet scrape across his left shoulder. Dirty Shirt swears he killed six men, before they killed him; so we all adjourned to Buck's place, where we find several neutral Piperockers hived up, waitin' for the battle to end.

We've got them snake baskets, ten cases of Bushwa and all them wolves in Art Miller's livery stable. Art is there in the saloon, and he starts wailin' plenty about some bullets comin' into the stable.

"You've gotta move them animiles," he declares. "I ain't runnin' no snakeree, I'll tell you that. And them danged wolves! I've done lost the leg off one pair pants already. If you jiggers are goin' to th'ow lead on their account, you move 'em out of my place."

"Might as well turn the whole works loose," says I. "Without the old Doc there ain't no show left."

"There is a show left," declares Magpie. "I'll run her. By golly, I'm as good as he is! I'll take this show all over the world. I'll be Doctor Simpkins, that's what I'll be; and you two snake hunters will go along with me. We'll show the world what came from Piperock."

"Who will charm them snakes?" asks Dirty Shirt.

"Anybody. The old Doc said they was as harmless as pieces of rope. Why, Ike Harper could even charm 'em. They don't need no charmin'. All you got to do is drape 'em around your neck and look wise. Hell, that stuff is all bunk. By golly, it wouldn't look bad at all."

"What wouldn't look bad?" asked Dirty Shirt.

"Ike Harper, with a savage wolf in each hand and a snake around his neck."

"And me a-shootin' at him," grins Dirty Shirt. "That's what you might call a specktickle."

WELL, I got a few drinks and does quite a lot of thinkin' about it. I'm not goin' to be a burden to any snakes—not as long as I'm sober. Magpie went out to post a few more bills, and me and Dirty has some more drinks, after which we went down to the livery stable to take a look at the animals.

Them snakes are in wicker baskets, with the tops tied down, and the wolves are tied in two stalls; Harry Hope and Freddy Faith in one, and Clarice Charity, with her three pups, in the other. These big lobo wolves are plenty resentful, especially Clarice. One pup came out to see us, and she almost tore down the stall.

"Quiet her, Ike," says Dirty Shirt, leanin' against the end of the stall in front of Hope and Faith. "You're the wolf man, ain'tcha? Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

Dirty doubles over with mirth, hit his heel on a slippery spot and lit on the seat of his pants in reach of Freddy Faith. For a moment there's plenty wolf and profane language, and Dirty rolls out of the stall, with the tail of his shirt over his head—what there is left of it—his right ear notched and one boot gone.

He sets there for awhile, his shirt up around his bleedin' ear, lookin' around for his missin' boot, which them wolves have gnawed to pieces.

"My Gawd!" he says kinda pious-like. "I wouldn't be you, Ike."

"Neither would I," says I.

"Can you imagine travelin' round the world with them brutes?"

"Not a danged foot. And when you season the dish with half a dozen boy-constrictors and pizenous cobras—my thousand dollars pales into insignificance, as you might say."

"Mine pales a plenty, too, Ike. I may be the champion revolver shot of the world—"

"The same of which is almost as dangerous as nursin' a wolf."

"Uh-huh. And that there Bushwa, marvelous as it may be, won't cure no bullet hole, wolf gnawin' or snake pizen. Ike, I'm jist about to retire as the undefeated champion of the world."

We went up to my shack, where I found a couple quarts belongin' to Magpie, and I fixed up the notch in Dirty's ear. I sewed her up with cotton thread and a darnin' needle. It wasn't a very neat job, 'cause there was a sizable piece missin'. Left him with one ear kinda pricked forward. Then I loaned him a boot, which was three sizes too big.

Along about that time, here comes Pole Cat Perkins. Pole Cat is a little old jigger, harborin' a pack of misfit hounds, which he claims can tree a cougar in five minutes after hittin' the track. There's eight of 'em, and they come stringin' along in single file, with Pole Cat in the lead.

We welcomes him in, but shuts the door against them dogs. He drinks a cup of raw liquor, does a jig in the middle of the floor and sets down with us.

"I been a-readin' them red printed signs," says he. "Int'restin', t' say the least. I've been havin' mizry in my off laig lately, and m' prize houn' is ailin'. Is that there Bushwa good fer dawgs?"

"Accordin' to the epitaph on the bottle, she's good for anythin' from dandruff to gin'ral debility," says Dirty Shirt.

Magpie had a couple bottles on a shelf, and I presented 'em to Pole Cat, with the compliments of Simpkins and Bunyan.

"One fer me and one fer a sick dog," grins Pole Cat, and he presents me and Dirty with a quart of liquor, which he had within the bosom of his shirt.

We thanked him kindly, gave him another cup of liquor and presented him with another bottle of Bushwa.

"Thank you very much," says Pole Cat. "That's fine. I've got another pup that ain't showin' much energy. His name's Napoleon. The other one's name is Wellin'ton. I got them names out of a po'm. Them two men was natcheral born enemies, and so is them two dawgs. I've got Queen of Sheber, Ramesees, St. Peter, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Points East. They're shore dingers. Well, I thank you for the medicine, gents."

He almost bowed his nose against the table, went out, lined all eight dogs up behind him, and went back up the street, while we tested out his bottle and dwelt upon our present misery.

"Wisht I was back at the cabin on Plenty Stone Creek," says Dirty.

"You wanted to be somethin' in the world," I reminds him.

"Yeah, I did; but I don't hanker to be no ghost. I'm too young to die."

"You're too young to die of old age, mebbe, if that's what you mean."

"Well, we won't argue morals, Ike. I was jist thinkin' that if there wasn't no snakes and no wolves and no Bushwa—"

"That there suggestion finds an echo in my heart," says I. "The champion revolver shot of the world and the champion wolf man of the world will fade out and—"

"That calls for another shot of liquor, Ike. You're a gentleman and a scholar, but a damn' poor judge of wolves."

"The same to you and your eyesight. Here's how."

WELL, we has a couple more and go back up town. Piperock is kinda indignant about Yaller Horse and Paradise shootin' around the street, but there ain't nothin' to be done about it, except to fix up the busted winders and wait for another chance at 'em.

We finds Magpie and Art Miller talkin' together, and Magpie tells Art to be sure and lock up the stable tight, even when he's in there at night, 'cause Magpie don't trust Yaller Horse and Paradise. Art sleeps in the little office of the stable, and we know he'd lock the front door from the inside; so me and Dirty sneaked down there after dark, while Art was gettin' a good night drink, and crawled up in the loft, where we sprawled on some hay, with a quart between us.

"T'morrow there won't be no Bushwa," says Dirty. "When Artie is asleep we'll releash everythin', eh, par'ner?"

"Thaz a fac'," says I, and went to sleep.

Somebody was shakin' me, and I woke up. It's Dirty Shirt with a lantern.

"I jus' went down and unlocked the door," he told me. "Art's asleep, and I fas'ned his door. Let's me and you have a snifter and then hol' counshil of war."

"Fine," says I, and uncorks the bottle.

"This is my idea," says Dirty, kinda owlish-like. "There's a hay hole over the manger where them two lobo wolves is tied. You go down that hay hole and cut the ropes and—"

"Who goes down what hay hole and cuts which rope?" I asks.

"The hay hole in the loft floor. Them lobos can't hurt you. That female and her offsprings don't amount to nothin'; so we let her stay. You cut them wolves loose and they head for the wide open spaces, *sabe?* I'll cut the fastenin' on them baskets and dump out them snakes. They'll also head for the open, *sabe?* And then I'll blow them cases of Bushwa so danged high that any ailin' human what needs medicine will have to sprout wings."

"How'll you blow them cases of Bushwa?"

"Forewarned is forearmed," says Dirty, and hauls a stick of dynamite out of his bosom. She's all capped and fused. "I'm usually ready for e-mergency, Ike. I've had thish idea quite a while. Well, here's hopin'."

We hoped together several times. I didn't like the idea of climbin' down that hay hole. Whisky increases my gravity a lot.

"Advansh," says Dirty. "What God hath j'ined t'gether, let no man put ashunder."

And then he stubbed his toe, went sprawlin' and threw the lantern plumb to the other end of the loft, where it went out, leavin' us in darkness.

"I'd crave to know who tripped me," says he. "That's m' cravin' now."

"Well, I didn't, so your cravin' is settled as far as I'm conshemed. But I don't need no light."

"Neither do I. I know from experiensh jus' where that hay hole is."

I thought I did, too. I went straight to it, but it wasn't there; so I stepped back to consider the situation—and found it. I hit the seat of my pants on one edge, my chin on the other, and landed regardless in that wedge shaped manger. I don't remember hittin' the bottom, but I was there, when the Fourth of July celebration was over. I never seen so many sky rockets in my whole life. It was a wonderful display.

I sets up and tries to figure out what happened to me, not rememberin' much about fallin' down that hole. Them two wolves are doin' quite a lot of fussin' around in the stall, and my gropin' hand finds the rope they're tied to. They're both on one leash, which has been run through a knot of rope tied to the manger.

I manages to get my knife out and opened, wonderin' how Dirty Shirt is comin' along with the snakes. I'm scared to cut the wolves loose for fear they'll tackle Dirty before he looses the snakes. I try to yell at him, but I find m' yeller is busted. I ain't got no more voice than a snake has hips. When you take a Harper's voice away from him, you've removed one of his great assets.

It's so dark in there I can't see anythin', but I heard a loud bump, and it sounded like a woman's voice sayin'—

"Careful, Doctor."

"Careful, hell!" snorts a voice, which I know danged well belongs to old Doctor Bunyan. "I knocked out three front teeth. You and your damn' snakes! We could be miles away by this—"

"But I couldn't desert my pets. When I think of the darlings in the hands of these rough men—"

"We've argued that out long ago. The question is, where are they?"

"They are in here."

"Sh-h-h-h-h! Some one coming!"

I hears somebody fall over a box, and I hope it's old Doc, 'cause I'd hate to think a lady could cuss like that. Then cometh silence.

"Damn' door's unlocked and no light on," says a voice, and it sounds a heap like Tombstone Todd. "Go easy. If they're layin' for us—sell your life as dear as possible."

"Don' nobody git 'n fron' me," says Yuma Yates, drunk as an owl. "When I shoot in the dark, I'd kill friend jush like foesh."

"You better stay here at the door," advises Dog Rib. "You be lookout."

"Thaz good idea. I'll guard the rear."

I can hear 'em stumblin' around, and all to once a wolf lets out a snarl.

"What the hell!" yelps Tombstone. "Leggo, gol dang you! Ow-oo-o-o-o-o-o! Damn a wolf anyway!"

Crash!

"What's the matter?" asks Dog Rib, his voice pitched high.

"Help me, will you? I stepped on a danged lobo, and when I got away, a set of harness fell on me. Don't yank! My gosh, ain't you got no sense? One of them hames is inside my shirt."

"He-e-e-ey!" squeaks Yuma from the doorway. "Here comes somebody!"

"Duck in a manger!" snaps Tombstone, and they go stumblin' around.

All to once I hears the wolves in my stall tangled up with somethin', and Dog Rib yelps:

"Tombstone, you're a liar! Them wolves ain't on that side! My Gawd, there goes m' Sunday pants!"

"Shut up!" hisses Tombstone.

Again quiet reigns, as they say.

THEN I hears a voice which sounds a heap like Hank Padden, sayin':

"Now listen, Hip Shot, this is a serious mission. We've gotta git them there snakes, wolves and bottles of Bushwa. Like I told you before, them snakes is in baskets, and them wolves are on ropes. We'll proceed—"

"I ain't heard nothin' else for two hours," says Hip Shot, kinda peevish. "I ain't no snakeologist nor wolferee, I'll tell you that. I bought for profit, not punishment. I'll pack m' share, but I won't be bossed, 'cause I'm as much an owner as you are. Ain't I, Hair Oil?"

"We shares alike," says Hair Oil. "But I don't like this here idea of an open door and dark ahead. I smell somethin', I tell you that."

"That's wolves," replies Hank. "I wisht I had that damn' long hair doctor here."

"He'd diagnose his last case," adds Hip Shot. "Him and his snake charmin' female. Well, are we goin' to stand here and make speeches, or are we goin' to proceed with the business at hand?"

"O-o-o-o-o-ow-o-o-o-o-o," sings a dog, somewhere up the street.

"What's that?" asks Hank nervous-like.

"Dog."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Well, how in hell do I know?" asks Hip Shot. "Ask the dog."

"O-o-o-o-o-ow-w-w-w-w-w-o-o-o-o-o-o-o," comes a sudden chorus.

"Lotta dogs," says Hair Oil. "I seen Pole Cat Perkins in town awhile—"

"Ye-e-e-e-e-e!" It was the yelp of terror from a human throat.

"My Gawd, what was that?" gasps Hair Oil.

"Sna-a-a-a-a-akes!" comes the scream again. "Git awa-a-a-ay! Help, help!"

"O-o-o-o-o-ow-w-w-w-w-w-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!" the dogs chorus again.

Wham! Wham! Wham! Three shots light up the dark stable, and Madam Lillian de Bergerac lets out a calliope scream you could hear a mile.

"Panther in here!" yowls Tombstone Todd. "Look out for a panther!"

I reached out with my knife and cut the rope that held the leash of them two wolves. They went away from there like a shot in the dark, and I fell over into the stall, landed on my hands and knees, and a bullet hit jist over my head. But I didn't mind it at all, 'cause my two hands closed over the body of a snake. It wasn't a little snake either, but I picked him up in both hands and flung him high, wide and handsome.

"Yee-o-o-ow! It's rainin' riptiles!" yelps somebody across the room.

Well, I've done everythin' I come there to do, so I starts runnin' toward the front doorway. That is, it was my intention to run, but I reckon it was more of a hitch and a kick than runnin'. Anyway, I got almost to the front door when somethin' happened to change m' mind.

The sudden change was inaugurated by Doctor Bunyan and Madam Lillian de Bergerac, who tried to beat me to the doorway. Me and Doc bumped into each other, givin' the lady a chance to win the race, and I'll say for her, she was exhibitin' plenty speed for age and weight, when all to once them two wolves, Freddy Faith and Harry Hope, came back into the stable, jist three jumps ahead of Pole Cat Perkins's pack of Napoleon, Wellington, Queen of Sheber, Ramesees, St. Peter, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Points East.

They're still linked together, and they passes on either side of Madam de Bergerac. I seen the lady up-end as neat as you please, and jist then the leash caught me and the discoverer of the Indian Bushwa.

As far as I can see, Madam de Bergerac never even jerked hard on them wolves, 'cause they're still doin' well when they hit me and the Doc. I was still fallin', when a dog hit me in the chest. Dogs? I never seen and felt as many dogs in my life. They took me like Grant took Richmond. I got to my feet, shook a lot of 'em out of my hair and started fightin' for my life. I never did see so much shootin' in one place—yellin' and shootin'.

Somebody yellin':

"Git out of here! Git out of here!"

I spits on my hands and tries to yell back—

"Take me out, dang you!" But nobody heard it, not even me.

Somebody runs into me, and I took right to 'em. I'm pretty numb, but I realized I shucked him of a coat and half his suspenders before he got away from me. And then the wolves came back. I tried to dodge 'em, but all I done was to work my jaws, and thought I was jumpin'.

Zam! I lit on my shoulders and the back of my neck. Somebody was still yellin' for everybody to run, and I reckon they thought they was playin' baseball and that I was one of the bases, 'cause every danged one of 'em stepped on me as they went gallopin' out.

BUT I fooled the last one out, caught him by the leg, and shore dumped him plenty hard. Silence reigned again. Either silence reigned, or I'd lost m' hearin' entirely. Then m' companion set up be-de me. I tried to tell him what I hought of the whole danged outfit, but ' vocal cords have rusted tight. I got m' feet and he got up with me. He lit match and we looked at each other. 's Egbert Willard Jones, what there is t of him.

"Isaac Beilin' Harper, you're a mumless," he says.

As far as I was concerned, it wouldn't ave made any difference, 'cause I ouldn't say anythin' back to him, but ust at that moment there came a bright ght, and somethin' hit me a terrible ash. In fact, it hit me so hard that it lowed me plumb out to the Pacific Ocean. ain't never seen the Pacific Ocean, but know it's somewhere west of Piperock. did enjoy the trip, but somethin' went rong with m' flyin' apparatus and I ent head first into the ocean.

There seems to be a lot of folks runnin' round the banks of the ocean, and some-ody is yellin':

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

Then somethin' banged down on my ead a couple of times, and somebody ells in my ear:

"Git t' hell out of this trough, will ou? I want to dip a bucket of water."

I dunno how I ever got out of that ough, and I dunno how I ever got back o our shack, 'cause every time I tried to oller a star, somethin' jerked it away rom me. But I made it. The Harper amily are shore hard to stop. There's lamp still burnin', and on the table is quart. I got it in the crook of one elbow, laid down on the bunk and pulled the cork with what few teeth I've got left.

Then cometh three men in single file—the queerest lookin' men I ever seen. One is Magpie, his right eye swelled shut, ll his mustache gone and half of his hair. The next one is Tombstone Todd, minus half his mustache, seven-eighths of his clothes, and nothin' but the brim of his sombrero around his neck. The third apparation is Hair Oil Heppner, bent kinda out of shape, hangin' in shreds, as you might say, and his face looks as though he'd been rootin' in hard and sooty ground.

Piperock, Yaller Horse and Paradise are represented. They sets down together.

"We mourns our loss," says Magpie. "I dunno how it happened, 'cause I got there jist before the explosion."

"I dunno," says Tombstone. "As fer as I can see, that there Bushwa jist exploded."

"As fer as that's concerned—so did the wolves and the snakes."

"A act of Gawd," says Magpie, pious-like. "There's a divinity that shapes our ends."

"Shore shaped mine," wails Hair Oil.

"Has anybody see any dawgs?" asks a voice from the doorway, and there stands old Pole Cat Perkins. "I've done lost sev'ral. Wellin'ton and Napoleon was ailin' and I sluiced each of 'em with a bottle of Bushwa. As far as I can see, it turned 'em into wolves. My Gawd, what that would do to a human bein'!" Pole Cat's eyes are as big as dollars. "It turned Queen of Sheber into a she wolf with a litter of pups. You gents ain't got nothin' t' drink, have you? I'm kinda trembly."

"We're holdin' a director's meetin'," says Magpie solemn-like. "This is a meetin' of Bushwa, Limited, Pole Cat, and we ain't—"

"Run me around, will you? Tough, ain't you? Keep goin', feller!"

Whap! Whap!

Into the room sneaks a big lobo wolf, scared stiff and whipped to a frazzle. He's draggin' a length of rope, the hair is all burned off his tail and he's limpin' in all four legs. Right behind him comes what used to be Dirty Shirt Jones. He ain't got no shirt now. Half his overalls are gone, and the other half drags behind his left leg. In Dirty's right hand is about five feet of boy-constrictor, which he's usin' to whip the wolf.

Dirty braces his feet and looks us over.

"I'm Egbert Willard Jones, champion revolver shot of the world," says he, kinda vacant-like.

"Tha-tha-that sus-snake is sus-still alive!" stutters Hair Oil.

Dirty looks around like an old owl, looks at the snake—and went flat in a faint.

"Kinda e-feminite of him," says Tombstone. "Some folks can't stand anythin'."

The wolf sneaked out past Dirty, smelled of the snake, and went out into the night. Magpie got up and looked me over.

"You're Ike Harper, ain't you?" he asks.

I couldn't affirm nor deny it, but I had m' doubts. Magpie picked up a garment off the floor, and I recognizes it as the coat I took off a man in the stable. I dunno why I ever clung to it, except that the Harpers usually stick with what they git.

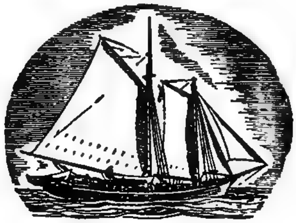
I hears Magpie grunt kinda funny, and there he is with a big pocketbook in both hands, his jaw saggin'.

"Doctor Rushford Maxmillan Bunyan," says Magpie, readin' a card in the front of the thing. "Doc Bunyan's bankroll. Five thousand dollars!"

"Two hundred less than we all pai him together!" yelps Tombstone. "We'l only lose two hundred dollars!"

"We'll charge that to experience," say Magpie. "It's a act of Gawd!"

And then I fainted.



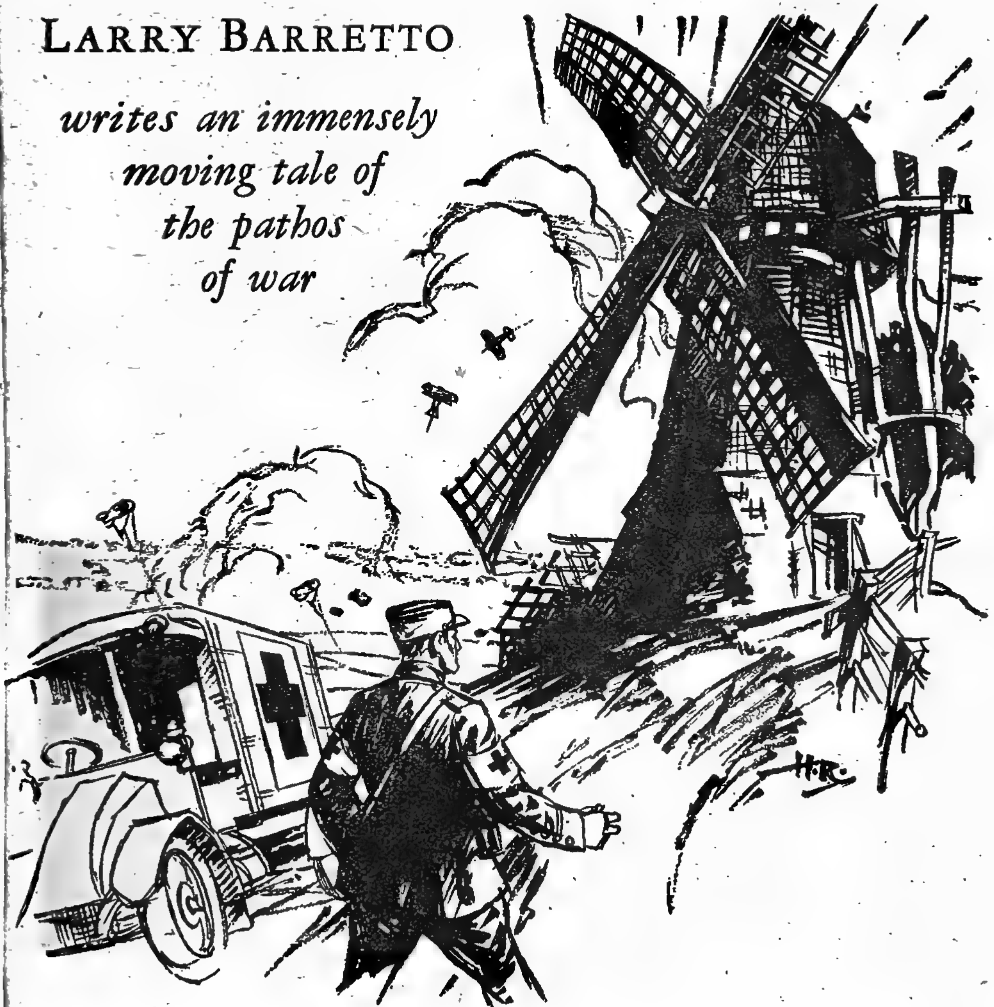
THE PRACTISE RUN

By Harry Kemp

BEYOND the shallows where the last buoy floats,
Beyond the nets, beyond the fisher-boats,
Leviathan rejoicing in the sun,
The submarine swept on its practise run,
Where it wooed blank submergence, and the blind
Descent whose courage kept the ocean kind!
Onward a space the trailing periscope shone,
Then this deceived the eye, too, and was gone;
Where it had been, a wave was, and beneath
Moved men who dared the greedy kiss of death.
Black dotted strollers went along the sand
And gazed out where the many-moving, bland
Waves twinkled. A lone whale that lazed up spray
Seemed to assist it on its hidden way.

LARRY BARRETTO

*writes an immensely
moving tale of
the pathos
of war*



HIGH EXPLOSIVE

UNDER cover of darkness the men of this specially picked detachment—sappers and engineers—marched along the Remy Road. Their orders had been strict, so that no cigaret glowed even for an instant in a cupped hand, nor was there any talking save for the whispered commands of non-commissioned officers. The road was not at this point very near the enemy lines, but one could not be too careful.

The solitary ambulance in attendance trailed well in the rear of the marching men, stopping at intervals in order not to catch up with them. The instructions to Jim Gilson, the driver, had been explicit too.

"You will follow behind the troops until they reach the point where they enter the lines," the French officer in command had said. "Your sole duty is to pick up any who straggle for one cause or another.

Don't open up your engine—and be as quiet as possible. This is not an ordinary movement of men."

Gilson realized that. The instructions warned him and he suspected that this specially trained body was destined to give the Germans filtering down the sides of Mont Noir an unpleasant surprise.

The Belgian landscape, dimly seen in the darkness, flowed past him as he drove; hop fields stretching away on either side across a greasy black plain, the poles standing stark in uneven rows. Here and there the shadow of a farmhouse, and ahead the blacker mass of hills which barred the Germans from the sea—Mont Rouge, Mont Noir, Kemmel in the middle towering above the rest. They, the hills, were dotted here and there with swiftly vanishing points of flame where French and English guns fired, and from them came the steady roar of battle.

The Remy Road grew narrow; it was soft underfoot and wet. Once in the glimmer of a star Gilson caught the reflection of water lying in the fields and he knew that in the spring freshets the brooks had overflowed. Beneath his wheels the road grew bumpy where it had been built up with split logs; the hop poles had vanished and in their place was a tangled thicket—shattered saplings rising from a swamp. The smell of stagnant water, fetid with decay, rose to his nostrils. The ambulance, creeping like a tired animal, was just entering this desolate spot; the troops in advance were in the midst of it.

Curiously, even before it happened Gilson began to tremble. His hands clutching the wheel were shaking; it was as if a secret sense had warned him of disaster. Dragging violently on the brakes, he halted the car. There was a screaming above him; a tremendous, high, eery moaning, and then the shells crashed down. Fountains of flame spouted in the blackness, streams of mud spurted into the air. Instinctively Gilson threw his ambulance in reverse and recklessly backed it, two wheels on the road and two in the muck, but he neither mired nor toppled over.

Save for the danger from flying metal he was not in range of the shells anyway. They were exploding in a narrow area. He leaped from his car and crawled underneath it and instantly his uniform was wet to the skin from the greasy water. Peering between the front wheels, he watched the disaster ahead.

"Oh, God, they're bracketed!" was all he could say. "Oh, God!"

In the horror of the scene Gilson forgot his own danger; at any moment the Germans might extend the shelling to include himself and his car, but he did not think of that. The only thought in his numbed brain was that ahead men were being blown to atoms; they were being tossed to the sky to fall again in a pulp of dismembered limbs. He thought once that he heard a cry, but if he did it was blotted out in the intolerable roar.

It seemed to the American as if it had continued for hours, but in point of time it was exactly two minutes. Then, save for the distant battle on the hills, silence thick with tragedy fell again upon the earth. With an effort of will that was almost physical Gilson got into his ambulance and drove as near to the edge of the swamp as he could. What he found nauseated him.

This part of the Remy Road had been torn into craters already filled with slime; it had become impassable for anything human. It had become for the detachment of sappers and engineers the last road they would ever travel. Death had crashed down from the hills; it had heaved up from the black waters of the swamp. There were still crumpled bodies lying on the road. Some still lived, but many of the wounded had tumbled into the water, where they drowned.

Gilson worked helplessly, frantically, in the darkness; he crawled from body to body, feeling of hearts that were still and calling into ears forever deaf. He shouted for help, but there was no reply. Some few of the wounded he dragged into the ambulance, then he plunged off the road at a faint moan. He was mired immediately halfway to the waist, but he struggled on to the man who was still alive, and with infinite difficulty dragged him back to firmer ground. The uniform was smeared with mud, but Gilson felt the *galons* on the sleeve. It was the French captain who had commanded the detachment. He was wounded in the back and wounded in the side; one lung had been pierced by a slug.

They lay together by the edge of the water while Gilson fought to get his breath; his legs were weak as if he had run for miles. The captain turned slowly where he rested against the boy's arm and groaned.

"I will now put you in the ambulance, *mon capitaine,*" the driver said breathlessly, and prepared to get to his feet.

"It is useless," the officer answered. "I am going to die." His voice was very faint, and gusty as if a weight oppressed his chest. Then the last delirium was on him and he pulled himself to a sitting position, grasping Gilson's arm. "They knew!" he cried, his voice now clear and strong. "They knew that we would pass this way."

His clutching hand relaxed, and he slumped over dead.

SOME *poilus* quartered on a neighboring farm had run up, attracted by the noise. With the help of these Gilson backed his car along the road until it could be turned. Then with it piled with wounded he set out for the nearest hospital. It was almost dawn before he had unloaded his unbandaged men. One more of them had died in the car and this but accentuated the appalling tragedy. Of all those men who had set out so confidently and so secretly for an unknown destination, but six had survived. The Remy Road. The name and the picture of it would remain in Gilson's memory so long as memory endured. It had been lonely, and quiet and black, lapped by stagnant water, and then suddenly it was an inferno of screaming, killing shells. In his exhaustion he found himself weeping and he shook his fist in futile rage at the hills behind which the Germans crouched. They had done it. The Remy Road!

In the pink morning as he drove back to the farm where he was quartered he remembered the first time he had heard that name. It had been but yesterday. Now as the sun rose above the plain he could see the farmhouse far off in its hilltop, with the arms of the stone windmill turning lazily in the air. His thoughts drifted, casual and unconnected, while he drove his ambulance toward it.

As he had driven last evening up the steep hill from the ruined village of Boeschepe to the house above, the farmer's wife had been standing in the door. She was apple cheeked, with thin gray hair drawn back from her placid brow, and she wore many petticoats that touched the ground as she dipped and curtseyed in friendly welcome. Gilson tried to remember all that had been said; the scene had been peaceful and if he could recall it firmly enough it might blot out the other scene which had just been acted on the Remy Road.

The American had left his ambulance at the end of the lane and had approached the house on foot.

"Good morning, madame," he had said to the little old woman standing there. "I am on detached duty and will not rejoin my section for several days. Until then I ask permission to live here."

He spoke French and was relieved when she answered him in the same language; so many of the Belgian peasants were Walloons who spoke only Flemish.

Her smile made him welcome.

"But yes, monsieur, if you will sleep in the barn," she answered. "There the hay is clean and fresh. I would offer you the house, but the old man—my husband—does not like soldiers sleeping in the house. He thinks—" her voice became embarrassed—"that they might steal. Not that we have anything of value."

"The barn will do all right," Gilson answered gratefully. "It is better than I have had for some time."

This was true; hurrying from France to the great battle that was developing about Mont Kemmel, he had slept where he could. He looked at the hens pecking the grain which she had just thrown them.

"Will you sell me some eggs?" he asked. "I will cook them myself and I will be glad to pay you what they are worth."

"Place your belongings in the barn. Then come to the house and the eggs will be ready," she told him.

Sitting at the table in the clean bare kitchen, Gilson felt that he was in luck. There was an air of tranquility about the whole place. Neither the house nor the barn had been touched by war. The hop poles which in summer would be heavy with vines stretched down the hill which was unploughed by shells. Through the window he could see the windmill with its curious latticed arms turning. At the foot of it a man appeared for a moment, carrying a pitchfork. Probably Monsieur Verschlagte, the farmer. Only the ruined village of Boeschepe huddled at the base of the hill and the soft thunder of guns were proof that a war was on.

Gilson had finished the eggs and the glass of cider which the woman had brought him.

"How much, madame?" he asked, and reached for his money, curious to hear the price.

He had been told that the Belgian peasants thought more of a franc than they did of the keys to heaven. Realizing that he had not bargained, he was a little nervous, but there was a surprise for him.

"I am not going to make you pay for the eggs," Madame Verschlagte said. "Do you know why?"

Her faded blue eyes were twinkling at him, but there was sadness in them too.

"No," Gilson answered.

He wondered whether he was going to be asked to lift the mortgage on the farm instead. In his encounters with the populace of France he had never won out yet, and he saw no reason why Belgium should prove an exception.

MADAME VERSCHLAGTE hesitated. Then she said quietly—

"I will show you." She then got up and stepped across the room.

From a cabinet on the wall she brought out a picture, and handed it to the American. He looked a little blankly at the youth dressed in the uniform of a Belgian infantryman.

"Who is it?" he asked at last.

"My grandson," the old woman whispered. "He was but nineteen when that was taken and but nineteen when he died. Two weeks later he was killed before Liége."

"That is very sad," Gilson told her, "but I do not understand."

"He looks like you!" Madame Verschlagte cried. "The same eyes, the same mouth and hair. When you came up our lane my heart beat so—" she patted her breast—"for an instant I thought it was Louis come home."

Glancing again at the picture, Gilson admitted that there was some slight resemblance. At least his hair and the hair of the dead boy who smiled at him were both fair, their noses were equally straight and they were of a height. Beyond that he could not see how he resembled the Belgian, but evidently the love of the old woman had found a likeness. He handed the photograph back.

"I would rather pay for my eggs, madame," he said. "If I pay I will feel that I can ask for more."

But she would have none of his suggestion.

"You shall live here free so long as you stay for Louis' sake," she told him. Her glance strayed to the window. "But do not tell my husband. He might not understand. We are poor people who have always saved. It is the habit of a lifetime. As for me I think nothing of saving now that Louis is gone." She raised her apron and wiped her eyes.

"I won't tell him," Gilson said. "And I am very sorry about the young boy, your grandson, madame."

She was openly weeping now.

"It is like a sickness, monsieur. I shall ever get over it. My heart is filled with ate so that I am no longer a Christian oman and I will not go to mass. They ave taken all that life held for me and so I could kill every German I would—like is." She twisted her hands together as she were wringing a neck. Behind them e door to the farmhouse opened and at nce her features became composed. My husband," she said without turning.

The farmer, smelling of manure and ith mud clinging to his top boots, ined them. He was a bent man with eavy shoulders, and tiny round eyes hat looked out above a tangle of whiskrs. He nodded half surlily while his wife xplained the American's presence, and hen retired into the shadows.

"He comes from Hainau and talks only lemish," the woman said.

Outside darkness had fallen and with it he roll of guns began again, louder now, a eavy trembling on the air beyond the low idge of hills to the east of Boeschepe nown as Mont des Cats.

"I think there will be a big new battle," Madame Verschlagte sighed. "Each lay the guns make more noise. Boomoom, like that."

"Probably," Gilson answered. "Our French division isn't sent in unless things are pretty hot, and all the roads I passed over today seemed to be filled with troops."

"What does he say?" asked the farmer from the shadows.

"He says the roads are full of troops," his wife answered.

"So. Ask him whether he saw many guns on the road to Poperinghe," the farmer continued.

Gilson thought.

"Not so many, no. I saw some batteries of .75's when I drove in that way. That was all. Why does he ask?" he inquired.

He thought that, living in the midst of guns, they would be as tired of them as he was.

"He goes to the market at Poperinghe tomorrow," Madame Verschlagte answered after she had translated. "If there is much traffic on the road he will go a longer way." She had brought out her knitting and was engaged in making a long gray stocking of coarse wool. "For our poor soldiers," she explained. "I make them high because they get wet to the knees in the trenches."

Gilson stood up.

"It is eight o'clock and I must leave," he said. "In an hour I go on duty with my ambulance at the Front."

Madame Verschlagte rose too.

"Poor boy!" she exclaimed. "I had hoped that tonight after so long a day you would have some rest."

"War will not wait," Gilson smiled at her. "Nor can I, madame."

"That is what Louis said," she murmured. "Go then, soldier, and I who am no longer a Christian woman will pray for you." She patted his arm. "Remember that my eggs are free."

She was a plump, mild little woman standing there with faded eyes, no signs of the hate, that she had said filled her heart for the death of her grandson, showing in her face.

Gilson bent toward her.

"I'll remember," he promised, one hand on the door.

But the farmer detained him for an instant more.

"He goes to the Front?" he asked. "Good. We need men there. Ask him if he saw troops today on the Remy Road."

But Gilson did not know.

"The Remy Road? That's strange to me. I've only just arrived, you see."

Two hours later he was driving his ambulance along that road, trailing the sappers and engineers who were marching to their deaths.

He thought of all this as he drove his car up the hill. The floor of it was still smeared with dried blood, evidence of the tragedy during the night which they had so little dreamed of in their idle talk. The farmer and his wife were not yet awake. No smoke came from the chimney of the house and the arms of the windmill hung still. Below in Boeschepe a starving cur slunk from house to house, but there was no other sign of life.

"I'll sleep," Gilson thought. "Then later I'll ask her to cook me some more eggs."

He would sit again in the clean, bare kitchen with the kindly old woman and the farmer who had showed a gruff interest in him. He would talk, telling them of the disaster, sure of their sympathy, and in talking he might forget. Stumbling a little, his eyes red and heavy for want of sleep, the driver went toward the barn.

IT WAS noon when he awoke and the sun was hanging directly overhead. From the hills the rumble of guns was continuous now as the battle grew. Over his fried eggs and the bit of stuffed sausage that Madame Verschlagte brought him Gilson told of the night. Her lips became compressed and her hands clenched as he told how the detachment had been wiped out. She was like an outraged mother whose children had been slain.

"They all died," said the boy. "All but the few wounded I carried back. The captain died leaning against me as we lay by the side of the swamp. He said in his pain that the Germans knew we were passing that way. Although I was half deaf from the explosions I heard him say that."

The old woman clucked her sympathy. "Alas, all the poor young men."

Before he had finished talking the farmer came in.

"But I thought he had gone to Poperinghe," Gilson said. "How could he get back so soon?"

"He did not go," Madame Verschlagte answered. "It is spring and we have to dig around the hop vine roots. But who will buy our hops this year?"

"Maybe the war will be over by fall," Gilson consoled her.

It was hardly fair, he thought, to talk overmuch of battle and sudden death in this quiet household which had already known loss. Madame Verschlagte translated this to her husband. He stopped eating with a hunk of bread in his hand.

"Who will win it?" he inquired.

"We will," Gilson said. "We've got to."

For an instant he thought he detected a gleam of amusement in the tiny eyes; it filled him with an unreasonable irritation, for his nerves were still raw.

"You doubt that," he retorted, speaking to the farmer through his wife. "Well, I do not. The Boches may be winning at the moment; it may be true that they are almost to the top of Kemmel and that they hold all of Mont Rouge. But they will not stay there. Every hour more French troops are being rushed up to help the English, and there are shells, too. Returning from the hospital this morning I saw a huge new ammunition dump." He stretched his arms apart to express the size.

"*Énorme!* The camions stood in line for two hundred yards waiting to unload. With what they carried we will blow the Germans to hell off these hills."

"Bah!" said the old man contemptuously. "Such a dump could not be established so quickly. I who have lived in the midst of war these three years do not believe."

"You don't!" Gilson retorted, rather nettled. "Go look at it yourself then. On the road to Abeille. There is a grove of trees to the left of it and a deserted farmhouse in front."

"But it is true, what he says, Pieter," the wife cried. "That is the house where the Vanderlyndens used to live. The ground is their lower meadow."

"The Vanderlynden farm. Well, it may be so," muttered the old man. "I work here all day and see nothing."

Gilson was preparing to leave and Madame Verschlagte, after picking up the ax that stood in the corner of the fireplace, followed him to the door.

"I am going to chop some of the old hop poles for wood," she told her husband. "We have not much left."

His pipe hanging from his mouth and with his eyes half closed, the farmer nodded agreement. But when she was out-de Madame Verschlagte stood the ax ainst the wall of the house.

“It was an excuse to speak to you,” she id to Gilson. “I am old and silly, but I not like to appear silly in front of eter. Are you not afraid of going out ere again where men are being killed?” e continued.

Gilson shook his head.

“Not very, madame. Besides, who ants to live forever?”

“But I am afraid for you,” she said gently. “You are young like my grandn—too young to die. And so I have ought you something to wear. It will ep you safe.” She untied a corner of r apron and held something in her hand. The medal of the Blessed Virgin of urtrai.” She opened her hand and owed him the silver disk shining in the n. “If you keep her with you, you will t be hurt. It is very precious, soldier, t I will give it to you.”

“You must keep it yourself, madame,” ilson insisted. “You might need it too.”

“No shells ever fall near us,” she anered. “Take it, soldier, it is yours.”

Beyond Boeschepe Gilson stopped his r and looked back at the hilltop. They ere a nice, friendly couple, he thought. he old lady, especially. To give him her acred medal was a real sacrifice, he was ure. It must be sad to have your only randson killed; it must be hard to have our neighbors scattered and your friends ead. He was glad at any rate that their ouse was still untouched. It perched here on the bare hilltop so gallant and so elpless within range of the German guns, while its windmill moved slowly in the light breeze, the wings hesitating now and then before they dropped in their downward path. He imagined he could see a petticoated figure in the farmhouse door. She was waving to him.

HIS WORK for the rest of the day, he learned, was to be merely routine—the carrying of supplies to a hospital and to keep his car at the orders of the chief doctor of the division which was coming up. Tomorrow or the day after, his own ambulance section would arrive and work at the advance posts would begin, but until then it would seem as if the medal of the Virgin of Courtrai was already keeping him safe.

In the late afternoon he drove again past the Vanderlynden farm where the munitions dump was being established. The shells had all been brought up and the motor lorries which had lined the road were gone. With that one evidence of activity out of the way Gilson could admire how well concealed the spot was. Except for the narrow stretch of road where his car had stopped it was concealed from all passing traffic; the grove of trees shaded it on the other side and a low hill stood between it and the German lines. It would be difficult indeed to shell it at all except with guns set at a high trajectory.

As he was about to start his car again a distant humming attracted his attention. A German airplane, a black speck against the hard blue, swept from nowhere in a long dropping curve. Instantly from beyond the grove of trees a French plane rose to meet it with a frantic roar from its exhausts. Gilson, his neck craning from the ambulance, stared fascinated. They came together, almost touching, it seemed, in intricate whirling convolutions and spins. Above the growling of their motors he could hear the staccato patter of the machine guns with which they tried to force each other down. The German was crawling up on the French plane's tail, slowly, inexorably, and Gilson held his breath. It seemed to him that if the French pilot would only zoom away in a straight rush he would escape the menace above him, and then he realized why the man did not do this. He was barring the passage of the German plane with the body of his own silver plane. He was holding the enemy from the munitions dump!

The Frenchman had dropped so low now that Gilson could see the blue, white and red circles on his under wings. Then as it seemed he must crash to earth he pulled from beneath the black eagle above him with a turn that must have been inspired and began to climb. It was now the German's task to protect his plane from the menace above it. Slowly, fighting every inch, he was being forced back to the hills over which he had swooped. Again and again he sought to break through to his goal only to have the Frenchman head him off. The watcher in the ambulance would have cheered, but his throat had gone dry with excitement.

There was a burst of firing from the French plane and before Gilson's fascinated eyes one of the German's wings began to crumple. The plane slipped into a spin and out again. For an instant the pilot tried desperately to turn its nose toward the German lines; then he must have seen that it was too late for that. Deliberately he made his last gesture. Turning, with his wing cracking under him, he swung the plane and headed for the munitions dump on the Vanderlynden farm. Gilson gasped. It was magnificent, but it was suicide.

The French plane was aware now of what danger its victory might mean. Above the German plane and pumping lead into it from his machine gun, the pilot tried to bring down his enemy before he reached the dump. The German wobbled, but he kept on. They swept across the road directly above the car. Gilson had a blurred impression of a white face, a frantic face, looking from the cockpit of the plane and then something like a slim dark shadow shot through the air. In the empty field beyond, the plane crashed down in splintered ruin. It had been defeated, but it had won.

From the munitions dump where the bomb had landed one isolated explosion came, which was followed by a sheet of flame that tore upward to the sky. The sunlight paled under it and the sun itself grew dim. Above the field the French plane, swiftly climbing, fluttered like a leaf tossed in an autumn gale. The roar of the explosions stunned Gilson, but it shook him to his senses. About him lumps of jagged *éclat* were moaning past. He threw his car into speed and shot down the road away from the flaming dump. Then on the edge of danger he stopped and with a group of awe stricken soldiers about him he watched the munitions burn. It was not until hours later that the fire died out and the yellow grasses from the sulphur blew away. On the horizon two squat German balloons tugged at their moorings and watched the conflagration with hostile eyes.

It was midnight before Gilson returned to the barn on the hilltop. He was numbed with fatigue, but through his exhaustion a strain of confusion and doubt was growing. It seemed as if a malignant fate had been pursuing him ever since he had crossed the borders of Belgium two days ago. The disaster on the Remy Road had shocked him by its catastrophic proportions, but the great loss of material during the afternoon was no less alarming. Wherever he went a lightning blow from the Germans struck the Allied troops. In both cases death had brushed him too. The medal of the Virgin of Courtrai still rested in his pocket, but for all the efficacy of it he might have flung it into the sea.

THE FARMHOUSE was dark and he was glad that he did not have to talk to Monsieur Verschlagte and his wife. There was no news anyway save of death and disaster—news they must already know—for the burning of the dump would have been plainly visible from the hilltop. Passing the corner of the house, he stumbled over the ax lying where the old woman had left it and he cursed. Then, bedded in the straw of the barn, he fell into a heavy sleep.

It was just dawn when he awoke with the stars paling before the growing light. In the valley dim shreds of mist still obscured the ground, hanging motionless in the still air. Nothing stirred. Not even a bird winged its way above the land and for once the booming of the guns was hushed.

There was not time for Gilson to get breakfast at the friendly farmhouse. Sometime during the night while he was on duty his outfit had entered the area and were now quartered on a farm. He had been told to rejoin them at daybreak and he was glad to do so. The sight of familiar faces, the talk of men who were his friends might help him shake off the obsession of defeat which had possessed him ever since the destruction on the Remy Road. But he owed a debt of gratitude to Madame Verschlagte for her medal and her eggs and he was unwilling to leave without saying goodby. So on the back of an envelope he wrote:

> "I have to join my section which is quartered on the Steenhuysen farm. If I can come again to see you I will."

This he pinned to the door of the house. Then he started his car and coasted down the steep hill to the main road. In the distance was the gray farmhouse half hidden among trees where his companions now were. He could imagine the activity about cars being overhauled in the courtyard. He would be glad to see the men. On the highway Gilson stopped his car and looked back once more at the Verschlagte house. Life passed peacefully there and in a sense he was sorry to go.

Something, the noise of his motor perhaps, had awakened them. He knew it by the smoke that curled from the chimney. Suddenly for no apparent reason the words of the officer who had died on the Remy Road came to him:

"They knew! They knew that we would pass this way!"

He had given that no consideration before, thinking them the words of a delirious man about to die, but now strangely they became fraught with significance. Delirious or not, the officer thought they had been betrayed. It was curious that on the same day Monsieur Verschlagte had spoken of the Remy Road, and still more curious that soon after he had told the old couple of the munitions dump it should be destroyed. In Gilson's mind a terrible fear was growing—a fear that he might be implicated in one of these tragedies. But he did not understand.

As he stared up at the house the arms of the windmill began to turn, slowly, hesitating in their path. That was odd. Gilson wet one finger and held it high above his head. No coolness touched it—there was absolutely no breeze. But he was in the valley; on the hilltop there might be. He looked at the chimney; the smoke from it rose straight and thin into the air, not wavering a fraction until it was dissolved. Revelation tore at Gilson's mind like a blast of light. Without wind the mill could not turn. The Belgians must therefore be signaling to the German lines with it.

He remembered the note that he had pinned to the door and his heart stopped. "My section which is quartered on the Steenhuysen farm," he had written. That information was being sent to the enemy. Gilson knew it instinctively, and his throat went dry. Presently, when the guns had been given the range, shells would come blotting out the lives of men who were his friends.

Frantic at the thought, he swung his car in a circle intent only on reaching the Steenhuysen farm in time to give a warning. He must get there before those wings of death had stopped. But he had not looked along the road. At that moment a French camion careened past at high speed, its driver screaming curses at the crazy American. The truck swerved to the left, avoiding the ambulance, but they did not entirely clear. There was a splintering of wood and one of the car's light wheels cracked and collapsed. The truck sped on, the driver leaning far out, shaking his fist.

"*Salaud!*" he shrieked at the American. "*Salaud—*"

Gilson looked helplessly at his wrecked car and then at the road which ran past the Steenhuysen farm. It was too late to reach it now on foot. He was spurred to action by the imminence of overwhelming disaster. Without waiting to get back to the lane, he started up the side of the hill toward the windmill turning on the top.

Hop poles impeded him and the claylike Belgian earth. Once he fell into a shattered cellar and when he climbed out his face was streaked with blood. He ran on again while further damning evidence flooded to his mind. She had cozened him, the old woman—taken him in with her talk of the dead grandson—soothed his suspicions with free eggs and sacred medals. He should have known. No Belgian ever gave away food. Nor had she been afraid.

"No shells ever fall near us," she had told him. Of course not! The Germans would see to that.

HE LOOKED up; the windmill had stopped turning and his heart grew sick. He dared not look back at the Steenhuysen farm. It might be crumbling in a cloud of smoke. He panted on. Then above him the mill began to turn again. Evidently the message was not yet done. Frantic foolish prayers rose to his lips, He was offering to die if he might get there in time. There was a wall to climb over—a wall whose stones slipped and tumbled beneath his hands. Gilson clawed at it, dragging himself on. Before his eyes red and black sparks were dancing.

He had reached the summit at last and started toward the mill. His legs felt strangely uncertain as if they belonged to some one else, and he looked at his hands. Would they be strong enough to kill them both?

The door of the mill opened and Madame Verschlagte came out. She walked rigidly like a sleepwalker, and her hands were spread, the fingers far apart. Gilson caught her by the shoulder; he spun her roughly about.

"*Espion!*" he cried. "You spy!"

And then he saw her eyes. They were glazed and set like a dead woman's, but beneath the fine hard glaze was a look as if the woman had died in horror. His hand dropped away.

"What have you done?" Gilson asked, his voice a whisper. "What is it you have done?"

Madame Verschlagte pointed to the mill. The American stooped at the door to enter. A piece of paper fluttered before him and he picked it up. It contained all the confirmation that he needed. A roughly drawn windmill, with the circle of its arms marked off in letters. The alphabet. Even the arm which acted as marker was indicated. It would be easy for a man as simple as Verschlagte to use.

It was dark inside the mill and at first Gilson could not see. Then as his eyes cleared he stepped abruptly back. Monsieur Verschlagte lay beside the lever which controlled the arms, and he was dead. The ax that had killed had been tossed to one side. There was blood on the crushed body and blood on the ax. The walls had been spattered with it, and the floor. It dripped across the floor in a thick pool. Feeling a little sick, Gilson stepped into the fresh air. Silently, her eyes fixed on the distant hills, Madame Verschlagte waited for him. She did not answer at first when he spoke to her and he had to repeat.

"I was sure at last this morning," she said. "I read your message to him and then found him turning the mill. It was as if he were doing it to my grandson Louis, my little boy. I cried to him and he did not listen. He sent me away, but I came back, with the ax." Her voice was dry and brittle with a terrible anguish. "I killed him ten minutes ago."

Gilson's face grew hard.

"You killed him ten minutes ago, but the mill has just stopped turning. The mill, I say—"

"It is true," she answered. "I did not have the code, but I spelled a message to the German lines—in French."

"What did you say?" the American cried. He glanced apprehensively at the Steenhuysen farm, but it was hidden in the trees.

Madame Verschlagte's contained calm was gone. For a moment her voice broke.

"I said, 'God save Belgium.' "

As if in confirmation of her words a shell sailed lazily from the crest of Mont Rouge and crashed on the hill beneath them. Another came and another. They were finding the range, moving higher. Now the hill was white with smoke from the bursting shells. They blossomed like great mushrooms in the still air. Madame Verschlagte began walking down the hill toward the shells. Gilson ran after her.

"You will be killed!" he cried. "We can not go there!"

The old woman shook him off.

"Soldier, you have my medal and if you go you will be safe," she answered. "Leave me in peace."

Rigidly, her hands still wide open as if life had slipped from them, she walked on. The ambulance driver stared after her. A great cloud came down and enveloped her; it rolled about her, folding her in its thick white fleece. When it had cleared she was gone.

The American paused just long enough to toss a match into the dried straw and débris in the mill. The sudden flame crackled and spread toward the body of the old man.

"Those she cared for shall never know her shame," the boy said.

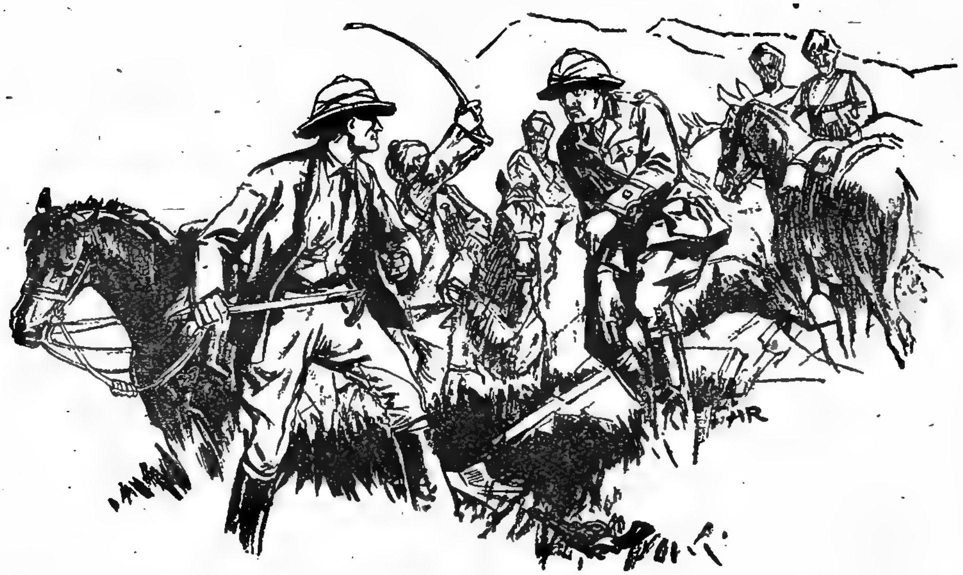
He wanted to weep, but his eyes were dry; he wanted to curse for the pity of it, but no words would come. A shell exploded nearer and he ran.

Far away again he watched the destruction on the hilltop. The farmhouse was crumbling and the barn had gone; the mill was a column of black smoke. He could see the arms, turning slowly in defiance, flaming against the blue sky.

Beginning

The INVISIBLE GUNS of KABUL

By TALBOT MUNDY



There came a day—a day of discontent
Begot by vision in the ageless womb
Of that old prostitute impenitent,
Salome, earth bound in the crimson tomb
Of this man's heart—a gray day dawning cold
In melancholy when a Voice said: Slay!
She has no title. Dagger loose her hold
And know no law henceforth save disobey!

CHAPTER I

"IT'S A POOR WORLD BUT THE ONLY ONE WE HAVE, GUP."

ANGUS—nicknamed Gup—McLeod, six feet two and a half inches of him, came untouched out of the Great War—untouched, that is, except by savagery that had eaten through the film of conventional courtesy toward forms that seemed to him ridiculous. He went in a boy, obedient to all the caprices of family tradition and the prejudices of what he had been taught to revere as civilization. Like many another man, before the war was over he devoutly hoped to get a bullet in his brain and strove to that end vainly. They gave him medals and they would have given him high promotion, only some one at headquarters thought that big men are a mistake. Besides, he had a way of smiling down from his great height that some people thought was scornful. Angus McLeod despised nobody and nobody's ideals in those days; he had not yet reached even the stage of despising himself.

But possibly a humorous, baffled sense of the absurdity of human makebelieve was laughing in his eyes. Whatever it

A Novel of the Afghan Border

BY THE MAN WHO WROTE
“KING OF THE KHYBER RIFLES”

was, it set the rank of brevet major as his limit of attainment in the war. And when the Armistice was signed, he, who could endure the unendurable and lead men into it because he could pretend to like it, was in India doing practically nothing.

He resigned his commission in India and for several months he was treated as distantly as formal politeness allowed, because it was generally supposed he would apply for a government job. Jobs were scarce and men not dying fast enough; but the McLeods, as a family, have almost a hereditary lien on India and he possibly had home influence, too, that might have forced the hand of authority. However, he asked for nothing, and it was presently learned that he had some private means—not much, but enough to prevent the salary hunger that makes half the world sheep and the other half wolves.

Then a new sort of suspicion, vague at first, began to rest on him. He was known to be studying languages but it was not understood why he should choose to practise conversation with all sorts of Indian politicians. He looked more like a Highland chieftain than a Bolshevik; his sandy hair and blue eyes instantly placed him, at the first glance, in the category of men who live and die with the ancient slogans on their lips. But unexpected things were happening and governments were supersensitive; a world bath of blood and explosion can bring forth greater improbabilities than that an atavistic Scotsman should turn rebel.

Angus McLeod had felt the thin veneer of education wearing off. It made him feel morally naked at first, and after he got used to that he began to be tactless and almost to flaunt his nakedness—his unbelief in the accepted standards of behavior and speech. He certainly chose unconventional teachers. Rebellion of any sort and judicious selection of one's companions seldom go together. That appears to be a law.

There are three good ways to learn a language, of which the first is woman. But Gup McLeod was in rebellion against woman also. His wife had run off with some other man home on furlough while McLeod was in the trenches with her photo next his heart. Perhaps she had foreseen the earthquake nature of the coming change in him, in which all preconceptions would crumble and leave nothing but incomprehensible fact to be faced. She was possibly wise; in course of time she had three babies and a bank account. And her cruelty merely hastened an event at the cost of a certain amount of torture to Gup's sensitive ego. He hid what he felt, under a mask of tight lipped silence, but all women, for awhile, became included in the disrespect that one had earned..

The second best way to learn a language is by studying religion, because that means digging for the form of thought behind the words and mastering the subtleties of thin split argument. But Gup McLeod was not the type of man who goes into a monastery when the world displeases him. His discontent included a suggestion that the mess the world is in is as much due to mixed religion as to unmixed depravity, so that the sight of a temple made him angry and the thought of studying comparative religions made him shudder. He had no desire whatever to reform the world. Let it rot. He believed that it would, and he thought that probably the best solution. His problem was to interest himself meanwhile, and to find something tremendous in which to engage his strength of mind and body.

The third best way to learn a language is to study politics—a more disgusting process than the others, but less dangerous, because a man can change his politics, whereas creeds are prehensile and women costly. Politics are cheap in their less esoteric stages and McLeod was enough of a Scotsman to appreciate that; so politics it was, and he soon became, as a result, amazingly proficient in three languages.

BUT HE kept strange company and he became known in all the ramifying byways of India's political underworld, which are as dark and sinuous as the workings of one of Zola's coal mines. Those are swift students of human character who sap and mine, for the fun and excitement of it, beneath the foundations of alien rule. They may be madmen and they may be miscreants, as certainly at least a few of them are heroes, but they are all sharp witted because they must be that or perish. So it was very swiftly understood that Gup McLeod was a safe man to whom to talk—a man not easily committed to a course, and particularly not to a course he did not understand, but a man who sold no secrets, whether for gold or favor.

Naturally it was not long before the ubiquitous government agents reported him through devious channels as a member of almost every one of the innumerable secret and seditious political societies with which India was swarming, as a worn out and neglected garden does with gophers. That, of course, was too much for even a professional bureaucrat to pretend to believe—but McLeod's mail was read and rather clumsily resealed; his trunks at the hotel were ransacked in his absence; he was shadowed wherever he went. There being no incriminating evidence, he was sent for at last by a very high and fatherly official, who produced cigars and whisky before revealing himself in his true guise of inquisitor.

"McLeod, for the sake of your good name now, be candid. Tell me what your game is. What are you planning, and why?"

It may have been the weather, or it may have been that an insight into politics had finally undone the last of McLeod's respect for established authority. He had a brainstorm. Fury and indignation swept away all self-restraint and for thirty minutes he poured forth all the bitterness that had been accumulating in his heart since the day when he saw his regiment swept out of being in Flanders. It was bitterness of incredulity, strangely impersonal and without malice, but almost as corrosive of the official's personal self-esteem as sulphuric acid thrown into his face.

"Good Lord, man! Are you an anarchist?"

"What an idiotic question! Only an ass could ask it! I am no kind of ist. It's the isms and osophies that have us hogtied. To hell with every theory of government from Plato downward!"

"You're a Bolshevist?"

"Do you think I bought the right to think, on battlefields, in order to bow my neck to a coiner of phrases in Moscow?"

"But you are known to have discussed communism with—"

"Good Lord! And I've read Einstein and Ouspensky! I've talked about the next coming of Christ with a Dokhobor who works for a Chinese herbalist! I've talked about adultery with a Catholic archbishop, and I've discussed the effect of constipation on a mathematician's style with a Seventh Day Adventist from the United States. Of which of those deadly crimes am I accused? I'll name a few more if you haven't enough."

"You are accused of nothing. I am asking."

"Answer this first. Do you think you know good government when you see it? Have you ever seen it? Do you think your own is even half good? Then mayn't

I go like Socrates into the marketplace and—or is this stuff that looks and smells like whisky and soda actually hemlock? If so, *Vale, Caesar,* I cheerfully drink to you and your orthodox box of pink pills for paleolithic people. I'm sick of this world—ready for the next, if there is one."

"Don't you think a man of your ability and breeding ought to try to redeem the world?"

"How? By joining your old ladies' say-so club?"

"You're aware, I suppose, that I can order you deported?"

"I almost wish you would. I might admire you if you did. It'd give me something to fight about. Misgovernment would then be personal to me. I'd make it personal to you, too. I've a thousand a year and some brains. Let's do it! You deport me and I'll make of you the historical example of Anglo-Indian Bumbledom! It may do good. I'll write you up, make speeches about you, slander, libel and lampoon you, caricature you, pay a member of parliament to accuse you before the house, set spies on you. You'll die famous!"

"For the time being, you are merely cautioned."

"Bunk! If a pickpocket did what you have ordered done to me he would be put in prison. You have read my mail, searched the pockets of my trousers, set stool pigeons to listen through my keyhole —and now you are inferentially lying! If you had a scrap of proof against me you would have me deported without granting me an interview. I am cautioned, am I? I warn you I'm on the edge of exasperation. Shove me and I'll go over. For the moment I'm neutral. I don't care if India goes to the dogs and you along with it; I wouldn't raise a hand to aid or hinder. I'm a loaded gun. You pull the trigger and—"

"You are nervous. You need medical attention."

That closed the interview, of which no shorthand notes were taken. But India is all eyes and ears, so a spy reported every word of it to several people, of whom Babu Pepul Das was one, in a room at the back of a store in the Chandni Chowk, which is the street of the silversmiths in Delhi. That afternoon two doctors and a secretary called on Gup at his hotel, where they subjected him to a mental inquisition, so obvious in its purpose and so diffident in method that it amused him, and amusement made him calm. All three were honest gentlemen, so they had to admit to themselves that he was quite as sane as they were. They admitted it even to him, but they, too, cautioned him against extravagance of disgust with life as humans elect to live it.

"It's a poor world but the only one we have, Gup. Try riding vicious horses for a change, or lend a rajah money and get drunk with him. But pick your rajah—they vary."

Gup McLeod took a look at his situation then and recognized the nature of the quicksand into which he had been ploughing head-on. It was not amusing to be thought mad. It would be even less amusing to be locked up on a charge of madness—stark sane and suffering the more in consequence. He decided to find employment; and since his mood was such as made orders from higher up unendurable he decided to go into business for himself. There being only one business in India that an independent gentleman of active mind and body, not possessed of much capital nor trained in any of the sciences, can profitably follow, he presently found himself caught in the toils of the second oldest vocation in the world, buying and selling horses.

Buying them took him to Dera Ismail Khan in the Northwest Province, where they hold the horse fair in the spring. And because he had chosen politics in lieu of woman or religion for his purpose, and they three are one, as is understood by all except the politicians who are the blind third of the triad, he encountered woman and religion swiftly, without knowing what he did until it was too late to withdraw. But that, it is almost needless to remark, was the fault of the horses.

Centaurs are only a mythical symbol of the truth which stands so plainly written on the scrolls of time, that men and horses are as necessary to each other as pen and ink. As every Moslem knows, Mohammed rode to heaven on a horse. And many and many a man has gone to hell on one.

* * *

But there is no way more beset with thorns
Than disobedience. That bawd within
Was trenched amid a mystery of horns
Of strange dilemmas, naming each one sin,
By whose authority none knew. So voices said:
Not this way and not that, lest thou offend
That living Spirit throned amid the dead,
Or lest thy fearlessness accuse thy friend.

CHAPTER II

"*HUZUR*, NO MONEY UNDER HEAVEN COULD BUY THAT HORSE."

ENDLESS lines of animals stood picketed that spring, and squealed, kicked, snorted their sense of a change in the tide on which destiny swims blindly in spite of all men and animals, who make only ripples on it. The war was over and there was no knowing what prices ought to be, some buyers even prophesying that the horse had had his day—all sellers swearing that a day without a horse is darkness. Booths, tents and temporary buildings hummed with the gossip of fairs as far away as Nijni-Novgorod. Bohkara and Samarkand brought tales of brigandy and leaderless revolt beyond the Pamirs. Some men told of an undergrowl in Kabul and its echo muttering down Khyber's skull strewn throat. Tirhoot and Bihar, the Dekkan, Bombay and Calcutta all had tales to tell and guessing to be done. And there were the English, even more than normally immaculate in khaki, looking as calm as the Romans used to in a conquered province, but a lot more curious than ever the Romans were as to what surprises destiny might spring. A sense of duty produces restless and exacting nervousness, more difficult to hide than ringbone on a horse.

Gup McLeod began to feel new interest in life at Dera Ismail Khan. Striding through the horse lines, thinking his own thoughts behind the barrage of the dealers' lies, he felt a comforting sense of detachment, as if he, although it might be only he, in all that crowd, was not imprisoned any longer in the web that men call destiny. He believed he was his own master at last, to do and buy and sell what suited him. He had planned to buy a dozen horses but there was not much prospect of his finding that number, since he insisted they must carry his own great weight as a test of money's worth.

"There is always a market for muscle," he told himself. "The only problem is to find both the muscle and market."

But there is a market for more things than muscle, and there are keen wits ever searching for the rare commodity without which not much else has value. Spirit, too, has a market price. There was never an eagle but some one wished to trap and cage him. But Gup was not thinking of traps: there was a coal black horse that he was pretending, with Scotch caution, not to believe was as good as he looked—a stallion from heaven knew where, with a plausible claim to be two-thirds English thoroughbred; and there was a man in charge of him, also from God knew where, who was strangely indisposed to sell, in a buyer's market. His was the only stallion that spring that stirred a little competition among those with money at their belts.

The man in charge would name no price; he invited bids, but he refused to allow the horse to be ridden, even by men whose horsemanship was known from Quetta to Aintree. Nevertheless, when Gup McLeod asserted that the big boned beauty was not up to weight he was instantly offered a ride. The apparent owner, an Afghan by the name of Rahman, even ventured a cautious hint that Gup did not dare to risk his neck.

"He is a stallion of stallions! God's breath is in him. He believes he is wind and an eagle in one! Iskander is his name—why not? A lesser name would be an insult to such a son of tempests—such a sire of lightnings."

Watched by hundreds, and especially watched by Pepul Das, who was an inconspicuous small Hindu wearing the fez and turban of a convert to Islam, Gup mounted and turned the stallion's head toward the hills. He and the stallion were one that instant—one force, welded by a wrath against all limits. It is not mere speed that exhilarates; it is expense of effort. It is not mere strength that stirs until the blood goes surging and the breath comes in deep draughts; it is the use of strength. Ability to lay leagues underfoot is relative; machinery and the wind both have it. But the horse, and the horse alone of all created beings, can awaken in man the consciousness of physical dominion, so that he becomes that very centaur that the ancients drew symbolically on the temple walls.

Gup felt balanced, for the first time since he went into the war in Flanders sharing with thousands of other men on both sides that dynamic calm that resembles the lull before a typhoon. It was a balance of emotions that never lasts long, being fraught with too much power, but for the moment there was only one emotion possible, felt and enjoyed simultaneously by stallion and man. The scented earth thundered beneath them, and the thunder was as passionate as the plunging of waves against a rock bound shore.

It was an overture to something; stallion and man both knew it, although neither of them cared; eternity, to both of them, was now, that moment, sensed and seen and almost understood, as effort squandered itself, glorying in sheer extravagance of being strong. There was no competition—no limit—not a muscle or a nerve unused—nor one mean thought in forty minutes of exultant and united living.

THEN back to the horse lines slowly, to let sweat dry in the wind and to let muscles resume quiescence without shrinking to the opposite extreme of stiffness—back to a supper and blanket and the almost cosmic music of a camp where tents were astir with the cooking and the smell of wood smoke sharpened appetite. As Rahman rubbed the stallion's legs he spoke to Gup McLeod as to one who has knowledge of matters normally beyond the ken of those who have not ridden from far off places over mountain passes where the snow lies shoulder deep and there is nothing between men and death but their horses' good will and their own resourcefulness.

"*Huzur*, with men and horses, it is all one. You, I, and any horse that lays a good leg to the ground—we are all one when we do our utmost. We have shone then as the sun shines. We have blown then as the wind blows. We are servants of the Most High then—may God be praised."

"But how much for the horse?" asked Gup McLeod.

He did not see Pepul Das, who was pretending to finger the off knee of a Kathiawari gelding; but as Rahman stooped to rub the black stallion's fetlock he could look under his elbow at the small man's mobile face and read his mouthing. There was nothing spoken.

"What is the price of an eagle in the sky?" asked Rahman. "Nay, it is not with money that a man buys spirit, as he might buy whisky in a bottle," he added.

It was a pointed afterthought. There was a barb in it.

"I have a bottle in my tent. You'd better join me," Gup answered and walked away.

Whereat Pepul Das approached very close and pretended to examine the stallion's corn, so that he might whisper to Rahman unsuspected even by his shadow. However, Rahman answered him aloud in the hearing of all who cared to listen, so that an officer who happened to be passing turned and stared, wondering what the cryptic speech might mean.

"Go, push the sun and make it set the quicker, Pepul Das. You see the journey's end, but I see this night's trail. I spur no willing horse on such a trail as this."

The sun went down in splendor and the stars, that looked as chilly as the northern wind, shone down on shadowy mystery where lamplight glowed and the sparks of camp-fires streamed in the lanes between the tents. There were few sounds now except the rare squeal of a stallion and, here and there, a song to a stringed accompaniment; the men of the North take relaxation dourly, and impose their manner by example; but there were circles of cloaked figures around the fires and, with suitable long pauses, there were tidings of wondrous affairs being told in undertones.

Plans were being laid that would creep to fulfilment at all nine ends of Asia. The Secret Service men were wrapped in none knew which cloaks and the approach of a stranger to any camp-fire brought down silence like the sudden ceasing of the speech of frogs.

But the English have different manners and the Scots are hospitable in a nervous fashion of their own, so that Gup McLeod's tent was noisy for a long time with talk about nothing. One self-invited guest who stayed interminably was a dealer in horses from Calcutta side, who hoped to learn something of McLeod's business; he had less chance than he imagined, but the whisky was free and plentiful and he seemed to think that chattering about tight money and loose women might tempt McLeod to talk horse, from which to indiscretion is an any-man's land that is crossed with half a dozen words.

But Gup McLeod talked platitudes, at which the Scots excel when on their guard, and the candle-lantern showed a thin smile on a lean, strong face that should have warned any horse coper that curiosity was useless.

The other man was Major Glint, an individual apparently in no haste, long limbed, lazy looking, but as keen in some ways as a Hillman's knife edge—a man proud of hiding his aim and motive behind lamely humorous conversation but less able to do it than he supposed—given to occasional ridicule of morals and zeal, the better to hide his own rigid rule of conduct as laid down for others. It was his boast that he had "spoiled more little games" and put more men behind the bars than any one else in India, and it was his delusion that almost nobody, and certainly no stranger, could see through his outer suavity to the heart of the spy within. A very pleasant looking man—until you saw his teeth; it seemed impossible that the truth could get by those teeth without being stripped of virtue.

RAHMAN came. Perceiving visitors, he would have backed away into a shadow but McLeod invited him into the tent, where he refused a chair but sat down on a heap of saddles and horse blankets. He was wrapped in his sheepskin overcoat that made his bulk shapeless, and his graying beard, which began unusually close to his eyes and spread when he dropped his chin on his chest, combined with the turban to make him hardly recognizable where he sat in the shadow; but his restless eyes shone in the candlelight, and about his shapelessness there was a hint of seasoned and surprising strength. He accepted whisky.

"I am not suggesting you are a hypocrite," said Glint, "but are you not a Moslem? Now we should call it sailing under false colors to acknowledge the Prophet and drink forbidden whisky almost with the same breath."

Rahman would have answered, but Gup McLeod's mood had not changed much since he rode the black stallion Iskander home to the lines. There was the same emotion surging in him, craving another outlet since he had to sit still. He sprang to his feet, knocking his chair over backward, and turned on Glint with blue eyes blazing and his fist clenched like a club.

"The man's a gentleman. What right have you to stick your teeth into his religion? You heard me invite him. Who gave you leave to insult my guest?"

Glint smiled.

"I did not realize you had had too much to drink," he remarked, and picked his way out of the tent, striding with a faint suggestion of a stork in search of pickings.

In the door of the tent he turned and smiled again.

"Tomorrow, if you are sober, I will give you a chance to apologize—before witnesses. After you have sobered up you'd better ponder whether you are in a safe position to make an enemy of me. Not many people do that without regretting it. Good night."

The man from Calcutta side got to his feet a bit unsteadily.

"You'll have to excuse me," he said thickly. "Quarreling is not my trade. I'd rather not be drawn into it. I heard nothing. I saw nothing."

"And you're good for nothing," Gup retorted. "Good night to you."

"Two enemies in one night!" Rahman commented. "*Huzur*, an enemy or two are good for us but—" he paused, stared, then took an older man's privilege—"did he speak truth about the drink?"

Gup raised his glass from the table. It was almost untasted.

"My first today," he answered.

Anger was still blazing in him.

"Is there then a woman in this quarrel?"

Gup stared, half inclined to hurl the balance of his fury at the Afghan. But Rahman was his invited guest, whereas the others had been uninvited; and besides, he had met this man in circumstances that had almost forced the entering wedge of familiarity. Mutual admiration of a horse transcends all limits of a formal introduction.

"Have supper with me," he said curtly. "No, there is no woman."

"Good. But I would rather quarrel with a woman than with that finder of faults. It was he, if you permit plain speech, *huzur*, who meddled in the business at Mahmud Kot and sent Captain Llewellyn home in disgrace, and for nothing except that the captain refused to salute him after he had whipped a horse until it bled from rump to shoulder. He poses as one who can tame bad horses, whereas he can only break heart and spirit. He has a devil in him."

"He'll get a licking in the morning if he doesn't keep out of my way," said Gup. "Sit down. I'll call the servant."

Rahman watched him as he strode out to the rear where food was cooking in a smaller tent. He watched in the same way that he would judge a horse's points, not taking them one by one but letting the whole picture limn itself on an undisturbed mind, getting a general impression first. He nodded approval. Nevertheless, there was laughter in his eyes, as if he knew that strong men build their own snares and entrap themselves if given scope enough.

"There'll be food in a minute. Let's talk horse," said Gup, returning. "Take a comfortable chair."

"*Huzur*, talk concerning a horse is a gate through which much speech may enter. Is it permitted that I take that riding whip, the long one with the whalebone in it? So—a moment."

He went outside the tent and made a circuit, peering into the darkness underneath the flies. A sudden yell announced that he had caught a man in hiding and was laying on the whip with a vengeance, but there was no comment from the nearby tents and Gup sat still. It was nothing unusual to catch a thief on the prowl; the police were almost helpless to prevent experts from sneaking through the shadows, and the law of the whip was a better solution than legal formulas for that sort of impudence.

"IT WAS as I thought," said Rahman, returning, a trifle breathless. "By the Prophet, though, the man was swift."

"Who was?"

Rahman laughed.

"He with the teeth—your Honor's enemy. He had his spy already placed where he might overhear my talk and so accuse your Honor of God knows what infamies. I am a person of some notoriety," he added proudly. "Doubtless he suspected me of intention to corrupt your Honor's policies."

"Oh, talk horse," Gup retorted. "I'm sick of all this nonsense."

"Let us have no more of it," said Rahman. "By your Honor's leave I will attend to that."

He stood in the tent mouth and whistled. Some one came—small and shadowy—clothed in a turban and sheepskin jacket.

"Watch," commanded Rahman.

He was answered by a grunt, then silence. Rahman took his place at table and the food was brought in. For awhile there was no conversation, because the servant, too, might be a spy and Gup offered no word in his favor. It is an old trick for a government to make use of a man's own household to overhear his speech and watch his doings. Rahman ate noisily, as much from politeness, to show appreciation of the food, as from habit of eating in horse camps, where a finicky man is suspected of lack of stamina; he ate enormously and drank with wonderful restraint, sip for sip with his host. They spoke of Arabian breeds of horses, and of the snow lying late in the passes. It was not until the servant had removed the tablecloth that Rahman opened up, his eyes on the smoke of McLeod's cigar lest his own eyes should be read too easily.

"And what of the black stallion?" he asked.

"I'll buy him," said Gup, "if you don't ask too much money."

"*Huzur*, no money under heaven could buy that horse."

"Then why bring him to Dera Ismail Khan?"

"He might be had, but not for money."

"I hate a mystery. What will you take for him?"

"He is not mine."

"Dammit—then whose is he?"

Rahman watched impatience rising, diagnosed it, understood it as he would a horse's fretting at the bit. He might not know what make of bit it was that produced that inner fury, but he knew the symptoms. He increased them before he offered remedy.

"*Huzur*, if it were known who the stallion's owner is, that man whom your Honor ordered forth from this tent but an hour ago would know no rest until he had wrought indignities and brought down shame on some one's head."

"On your head?"

"On my head also. But first on the head of the horse's owner."

"Why? Is he a border thief? Did he steal the horse?"

"By Allah and by my beard, no! *Huzur*, are you a border thief and do you steal horses? Is it necessary that a man be vile in order that a government should set the secret agents on his trail?"

"None better than I can answer that," said Gup with a low laugh that had no mirth in it. "The truth is, Rahman, that no good government has been invented yet. However, what's the trouble with the stallion's owner?"

"Nothing, *huzur*, except a strong distaste for prison."

"Is he in prison now?"

"May God and His Prophet be praised, not yet! Nor shall be! But for the owner of that stallion to visit Dera Ismail Khan or for you to visit that stallion's owner would be as dangerous as to—as to cross the Pamirs in midwinter."

"How so? Is he far from here?"

"Not as you and I reckon distances."

"I'm a free man, Rahman. I visit whom and when and wherever I please. I would like to meet the owner of that animal. What I can't understand is why, seeing he won't sell, he sends the stallion to a horse fair."

"I will answer, *huzur*. Let the truth speak for itself. It was known that your Honor will come to Dera Ismail Khan. It was also known you are a man of strong will, much annoyed by having seen the entrails of intrigue; a lover of plain speech. How then shall a meeting be arranged between your Honor and that stallion's owner, to whom intrigue is as needful as air to a bird, and to whom plain speech is forbidden? Should I come and openly try to arrange it—and be ordered out of your Honor's tent like that dog who took me to task about religion? Nay. Neither am I a man who will eat such shame, nor is the owner of that stallion one whose embassies—"

Gup whistled softly.

"Embassies? You speak in highfalutin' terms."

Rahman ignored the interruption, as if he had not heard it and had not used the word embassies with deliberate intention.

"What better way then, *huzur*, than to bring hither such a stallion as challenges attention? And as a result do I not sit here at your Honor's table, speaking of such matters as could not have been spoken of otherwise between us two?"

"Stated plainly, then, the owner of that stallion wants to meet me? Why?"

"If I should answer," Rahman said, "what proof is there? Speech face to face is better than through the mouth of the most trusted messenger."

"But you say it's difficult to see this person."

"Difficult for spies, yes, and for busybodies and for fools. Impossible by day because of suspicion and watchfulness on the part of many who would give one eye for leave to follow. But by night—"

"Which night?"

"This night is as good as another."

"Very well," said Gup. But his Scotch common sense had not deserted him. "This is a wild borderland. I suppose you came prepared to prove your good faith?"

"By Allah and by my beard, I and my word are the same thing," Rahman answered. "This, you and I both know: that any liar can come carrying proofs, which are as often as not forged or stolen. Few men know a horse; yet you do. Fewer yet can read a man's eyes; you may read mine, or you may not read them, just as you will. But I know this: that you yourself were challenged to give proofs of good faith to your government and that you gave none. What is good for the horse from Kabul, let the horse from Kandahar eat also. I have no proofs."

"Very well," said Gup. "That is certainly an honest answer. I will go with you."

"Let us pack up the tent," said Rahman. "You can not be back by morning. It would not look well for the tent to be seen, and no owner. Let my servants do it. There shall be nothing lost or stolen."

Gup hesitated for a moment, arguing with himself. But the thought stood foremost that he was invited to explore some byway of life that had been fenced off by bureaucracy.

That extraordinary temptation was almost stronger than the wish to meet the unknown owner of the black horse. Also it still rankled in him that insolent fools had dared to think him guilty of sedition. He knew himself guilty of nothing except rage at false standards of living and outworn methods of compelling men to think and act alike. The ride that afternoon had reawaked in him a fury that knew no limits.

"What about my servant?" he demanded.

Rahman answered readily:

"Bring him also. Such men talk if they are left behind."

"I have three horses here and three grooms."

"Bring them."

"You say there shall be nothing lost or stolen? Down with the tent then. I will hold you answerable."

* * *

Now disobedience became a law
Vampiric—a new fetish to be fed,
A monstrous wind blown effigy of straw
That would not follow whither Judgment led
Lest Judgment copy Custom. Fear,
Hydra headed, had a head unslain
To blood-suck purpose. All gains disappear
And leave the whole long fight to win again.

CHAPTER III

"ANYBODY KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT McLEOD?"

THE deputy commissioner was acting for a superior home on leave. He was feverish, overworked and worried. Furthermore, he hated Glint, hated him straight to his face and resented the obligation to have dealings with him.

"If I believed in reincarnation, Glint, I should say you were once an informer at Nero's court. I have never heard you give any one except yourself credit for even ordinary decency. And you're the most ingenious man I've ever known when it comes to inventing jobs from which you can't be dislodged. Damn you, I wish you'd get yourself transferred to another province—or at least to another district."

"I do my duty and I try to be impersonal," said Glint. "I don't expect to be admired for it. The prisons are full of people I have brought to justice. Government offices are overstaffed with men who have sought to prevent me. However, I did not come to you to talk about opinions, but about this case, which leaves no room for opinion. It calls for action."

"You will have to wait then. I refuse to talk to you alone about it."

One after another, junior members of the district committee drifted in, lighted cigars and took haphazard chairs in the uncomfortable office. It had been furnished with an attempt to combine dignity and ease, a compromise that resulted in formal dreariness, particularly before ten o'clock when the sun would shine through the window and touch things up a bit. Every one looked bored, except Glint, who sat bolt upright and wore an air of ingenuous virtue.

"Secretary, read the minutes."

"I object."

"Why?"

"Minutes are confidential. Has Major Glint a letter of appointment to this committee?"

"No, I haven't."

"Secretary, make a note of that—objection sustained after consultation. Ayes have it. Now, what?"

"Angus McLeod, ex-brevet major, was in Dera Ismail Khan, in camp, until last night," said Glint. "Ostensibly here to buy horses."

"No harm in that. Any one may buy a horse who has the price. I wish I had; my old Shere Ali has developed a running abscess—three vets had a look at it; they only torture him; it still weeps."

"Have you tried any of those new chemicals they invented for trench mouth? Kill anything that wiggles without harming the tissue."

"I was speaking of McLeod, if you'll permit me," Glint interrupted.

"Go on then. Try to make it interesting."

"Order, please. Let's get this over with. I've a hundred and one Fahrenheit. Anybody want my job?"

"I happen to have access to some confidential files," said Glint, "and I find that McLeod has been suspected for a long time of seditious intention. He has kept bad company. He has been officially cautioned."

A voice over by the window piped up—

"Let's see the particulars."

"Certainly not. Such reports are confidential," Glint retorted. "I should have to get permission, which would take a week unless I wired for it. Do you wish me to wire?"

"Proposal tabled for consideration. Ayes have it. Go on."

"Last evening I paid him a visit, in his tent."

"A visitation!"

"Order, please. Don't interrupt him or it may take all day."

"I found him in conversation with the Afghan, Rahman, and you know what that means."

"Certainly. Rahman is the safest man to buy a horse from, anywhere North of Delhi."

"Rahman," Glint retorted, "is one of the most dangerous intriguers at liberty. He should be required to report to the police twice daily as long as he remains on our territory."

"Too many have to do that now, fifteen hundred of them," said the chairman. "The police are becoming clerks."

"They are," said the police officer. "And besides, Glint's little game is to clap an order on 'em to report twice daily. Then, when they start for their own country he has 'em arrested for not reporting. That's clever, but it isn't decent and I object to using the police in that way."

"Since when have you been dictator of how the police shall be used?" Glint asked him. "As I understand it, you are supposed to obey orders."

"For heaven's sake, let's get down to business," said the chairman.

"But for interruptions I could have finished," said Glint. "I report that McLeod—take this down, please, Secretary—I report that McLeod was in conference last evening with Rahman. That he caught my servant listening underneath the tent fly—"

"Your what?"

"My servant."

"Don't you mean your stool pigeon?"

"Servant—have you got that, Secretary?—caught my servant listening and whipped him severely. Furthermore, he set a guard outside his tent, a man named Pepul Das, a known renegade, who has served a prison sentence. Pepul Das summoned several Afghans, so that the tent was surrounded by cutthroats—"

"Whose throats did they cut?" the chairman asked.

"Surrounded by Afghans then, who allowed no one to approach."

"Perfectly lawful," said the police officer. "Did they harm any one?"

"No, not as it happened. But they increased my suspicion and caused me to go home and search my confidential files, with the result that I am well satisfied that McLeod is up to mischief. Under the Prevention of Sedition Act we have the right to hold him for investigation on a warrant issued by you acting as deputy commissioner for this district. I demand that."

"ANYBODY know anything about McLeod?" the chairman asked.

"He's a gentleman—a damned decent fellow."

"Quick tempered, but as straight as a shot. Served in the war with distinction. Several medals, one for bravery. Three wounds, I think."

"We'll need more facts before we can arrest him," said the chairman.

"Very well then. Pepul Das is a paid retainer of the ex-Ranee of Jullunder."

"Oh!"

"The ex-Ranee of Jullunder is in hiding but is known to be moving about the country. Rahman is known to have carried a message for her when he came down the Gomal Pass a week ago," said Glint.

"Who knows all this?"

"I know it," Glint insisted. "Do you wish me to produce my witnesses? That would take twenty-four hours, and in the meantime McLeod may start trouble. Those Afghans pulled his tent down in the night, and they all vanished."

"Why didn't you follow them?" the policeman asked. "I don't see that you did your duty."

"Thank you. If you would attend to your own duty and not interrupt me this district would be a great deal safer. As it is—I suppose you know that the ex-Ranee of Jullunder is an English woman."

"English be blowed! She's a Cape Dutch girl."

"Well, half English. Doubly dangerous. Cold shouldered by her own race and maddened by a taste of power. Plenty of money. Capable of any sort of intrigue and very difficult to keep an eye on because of the purdah customs. Ever since the rajah died she has been financing seditious movements and corresponding with the tribes across the border. I believe I have told you enough. I demand a warrant for McLeod's arrest."

Glint crossed his legs and waited.

"This ought to go to the lieutenant-governor," said the chairman.

"Not at all. This is an emergency," Glint answered. "And I would like personally to serve the warrant on McLeod."

"Why?"

"Because I would like the chance to talk to him for his own good."

"I thought I smelt a nigger in the woodpile," said the voice by the window. "Nothing personal in this?"

"I am never personal," said Glint, "in matters of duty. I believe McLeod needs some advice, and I believe I am the one to give it. It may be not too late to make him see the error of his ways. He is tinged with Bolshevism—"

"What do you know about Bolshevism?" interrupted the voice near the window.

All that Glint could see was rounded shoulders turned toward him and the outline of a graying bullet head. He retorted angrily:

"I have no time to give you a lecture on that subject. I believe McLeod is tainted. His mood is rebellious. He can see no good in any established order. I gathered that from conversation with him yesterday."

"Well," said the chairman, "I find nothing proven. What say the rest of you?"

"Put it up to the lieutenant-governor."

"Pass the buck, eh? I say, scotch it."

"Same here."

"Glint," said the chairman, "can go to the civil court and get a summons against McLeod for having whipped that eavesdropper."

"No witnesses," said Glint.

The chairman continued:

"Nevertheless you can summons him, can't you, and gain time? It may bring him to his senses. Request for a warrant refused for reasons stated. Objections? None. Ayes have it. Have to ask you fellows to excuse me; I think my temperature's going up. I'm off to bed. Any one passing the doctor's bungalow? Mind asking him to drop in and see me?"

"Such is government. Such is imperial recognition of a public servant's zeal!" Glint grumbled as he stalked out of the meeting alone.

So sought he the New Grail. Impenitent,
He pledged impenitence to unknown gods,
His own imagin'd creatures. Fury, pent
Within him, burst. He said: If great Jove nods
While agony each act of faith pursues,
Nor marks the bitter anguish of a world that weeps,
I go alone! No more I pay those dues
Nor ever bow this forehead to a God who sleeps.

CHAPTER IV

"IS THIS THE REDHEAD?"

RAHMAN was a man of tact as well as mystery and strategy. He mounted McLeod on Iskander again, thus creating a mood. A romantic Scotsman astride a splendid horse at night under the stars, ignorant of where he is going, becomes a vehicle for utterly unconventional ideas. In other words, he becomes a poet. Rahman ordered his own men to surround McLeod's servants and to lead them with their baggage to a rendezvous. Apparently he had a horde of followers; he sent another party in an opposite direction, selecting for their leader a man who, in darkness, looked so like himself as to deceive keen eyes. He gave that man orders to attract attention, so as to draw off pursuit.

"Beat whoever offers thee excuse. If the police arrest thee, say thou art Rahman. I will pay the fine."

He and McLeod and another rode away into a stream of mist that flowed along wind from the Indus. In the mist they changed direction eastward, going slowly lest their horses leave too deep an imprint on the ground, but at the end of a mile they swung northward again, and when they could see the stars they broke into the easy lope at which horses can go for hours without wearying. Speech at that speed would have been easy, but there was nothing said until Rahman drew rein to ease his horse into a *nullah*, where in the shadowy depth he waited for the third man to overtake them.

"This is Pepul Das," he announced

then. "He was an idolator once. Ill fortune in those days dogged his footsteps, as it should be. Allah! May all idolators die ugly deaths! He was caught and thrown in prison, where Allah saw fit to enlighten him and he adopted the true religion, becoming circumcized. Thenceforth he was a man to reckon with, although he looks like nothing much."

The man described as "nothing much" looked almost dwarfish on the big horse he was riding, and the sheepskin jacket threw his body out of all proportion. The end of his turban, thrown over his mouth, served as mask and there was nothing to judge him by except Rahman's introduction and a pair of small, bright, sunken eyes that danced with interest.

"I hope I speak to one with whom my destiny runs parallel," he said in neatly pronounced English. "Has Rahman told you whom we ride to see?"

"No," Rahman interrupted. "Let him see for himself. Let him judge for himself."

He spurred his horse, led the way out of the *nullah* and made room for McLeod beside him on a trail that barely allowed room for two horses abreast, thus forcing Pepul Das to keep his distance. He made his horse kick when the smaller man crowded him.

They rode in silence until within half an hour of daylight, roughly following the direction of the River Indus toward the mountains. It was cold and dark when Rahman at last drew rein and threw up a warning hand. There was nothing visible except deeper shadow a hundred yards ahead and McLeod felt suddenly the same loneliness that he had experienced in No Man's Land in Flanders, where a bullet might pop out of nowhere and plunk into its mark, as weirdly free from relevancy as life and death are. There was no reason why they should not be shot, all three of them; that northwest border is a land where as many hairy human thieves as jackals prowl by night. Rahman turned on Pepul Das.

"Speak, thou!" he commanded. "Speak swiftly!"

He may have thought it beneath his own dignity to make such a noise as Pepul Das did, ululating a weird cry like nothing human; it suggested horror, but it was answered after a moment, almost echoed, from the gloom in front, and Rahman led forward at a snail's pace.

"*Ahsti! Ahsti!** Hold that stallion. If we come too fast they may think we are police who have the signal. A policeman's life is worth less than an anna in this place."

There came a challenge out of the darkness. Rahman answered it. A man came picking his way slowly between sharp stakes set into the ground. He set his foot into each stirrup in turn and raised himself to examine all three faces.

"Who is this one?" he demanded, balancing, with his hand on McLeod's saddle.

"Fool!" said Rahman. "For whom went I? And whose black stallion is he riding, thou owl out of hell?"

The "owl out of hell" swung himself up behind McLeod, but Rahman would have none of that.

"Get down and lead!" he ordered. "Shall we gut good horses on the stakes? Show thou the way."

IT WAS a winding way, so guarded by stakes, with their sharp ends made hard by burning, as to impale the horse of any one intruding in too great haste. It led to a low wall, ruinous and overgrown with creepers, and beyond that in gloom was a formless mass of something solid. The horses' hoofs rang on stone pavement that was, nevertheless, too covered with dust and dead weeds to be visible. These seemed to be the ruins of an ancient fort. A red light appeared through a chink in masonry, or it might be from a dugout.

"Is your Honor afraid of devils?" Rahman asked, laughing to hide a certain nervousness he felt himself. "This place is near where in former times the British took a beating from the Sikhs. Many were lost on both sides and they say—" he paused and listened—"they say the spirits of those men still fight their battles here. Few visit the place. There were robbers in hiding when we came, but we drove them forth."

---

*Slowly! Slowly!

He rode a little closer to the shadowy ruins and some men clad in sheepskin cloaks came out and took the reins. Rahman gave them gruffly explicit orders regarding the horses, following with threats of what would happen if the stallion caught cold.

"And if there is no room in hell for you, what care I?" he added. He seemed relieved at last and almost genial, as if a weight were off his mind. "*Huzur*," he said, signing to McLeod to follow him, "it was naught else than Allah's will that has brought this to pass. Let Allah guide you and all of us henceforth."

Then he led on, striding with the irregular footfall of a horseman born amid the mountains. Pepul Das wanted to follow but he turned on him.

"Go thou and do thy business."

Pepul Das turned away, grumbling, and Rahman led on. There was no door in the first wall; they passed through a gap, where they stumbled on broken débris. But in an inner wall there was a door made something like a hurdle covered with sheepskin; and within that there were more than a dozen curtains hanging in a narrow passage. Behind each alternate curtain stood a man with a candle lantern, armed to the teeth with Northern steel, but there were no firearms visible, although McLeod thought he heard a breechlock click when he passed by a gap in the masonry.

At the end of the passage was another door of hide and wickerwork, and there a tall Pathan stood with a *tulwar* at his waist—a great, black bearded savage with a genial grin which showed that half his yellow teeth were missing.

"Does she sleep?" asked Rahman.

"Allah! She never sleeps when there is anything else that devils can invent for her to do. Allah pity us, who serve a woman! Is this the Redhead? Allah, but he stands well! Bring him forward to the light where I may see him."

"Open!" commanded Rahman. "Art thou a dog at a door, to keep a guest at bay?"

Gup smelt scent now—musky, exotic stuff suggesting warmth and luxury. But it also suggested danger of the sort that lends itself to no classification in advance but merely makes the spine feel creepy and the will weak. However, anything that made McLeod feel less than master of himself just then was an irritant that spurred him forward. He feared to yield to indecision more than he dreaded any other danger.

"What are we waiting for?" he demanded.

The guardian of the door struck iron with the flat of his naked *tulwar* blade—a harsh, clanging signal that was answered from within by a woman's voice. The door opened awkwardly, on leather hinges. A parchment covered lantern shed red light, and in the midst stood a girl not more than twenty years of age, dressed in an Indian *sari* that was white, but the red light changed it to shimmering crimson. She had a jade stud in her nostril, dark skin, dark hair and a smile that included all life within the scope of one amused irreverence.

"Enter," she said in English.

Now Gup hesitated. On that stallion beneath the stars his thoughts had been of chivalry. Heredity had surged up, picturing in his imagination days gone by when men rode seeking for the Holy Grail, and days again when they rode with Richard of the Lion's Heart against the paynim for the sake of an ideal. An idealist at all times, he was never less than now in a mood to [illegible] abominable women. Judging by the woman's silken trousers, she was Moslem; she should be ashamed to show her face before men. But he glanced at Rahman, who appeared uncomfortable, and the Pathan had turned his back. Those two were nervous because she was respectable, yet unveiled. So Gup strode in, surprised to discover that Rahman did not follow.

The girl closed the door and fastened it with leather thongs. She was still laughing silently to herself. Her amusement suggested surprise in reserve, which put Gup's nervousness on edge again and made him wish he had a weapon. He had heard all sorts of extravagant tales about men being trapped into harems and then slain because a jealous Moslem had caught his favorite peering with too much admiration through slatted blinds. However, he had no weapon and must make the best of it, so he followed the girl down a passage that turned to the right.

AND NOW he knew he was within an ancient fort. The masonry had been cleaned and smeared with ocher. There were rugs strewn underfoot. On the walls were curtains—nothing wonderful, but good enough to lend the place an atmosphere of comfort. He noticed there was nothing there, except the color on the walls, that could not be removed at a moment's notice.

The roof, for a wonder, seemed to be in excellent repair, but it looked as if it might be the floor of a long ago demolished upper story. Probably there was a mound of grass grown débris overhead; all India is full of mounds that overlie old ruins, and to explore them all would be a task beyond even a government's power or authority, since if only one body has been buried on the mound within the memory of man the place takes rank as a cemetery, which is sacred and may not be touched with pick and shovel. Consequently, thieves, who have no reverence for such things, find hiding a simple matter.

Thus far, door, rug, attendants, hangings, all might belong to a gang of border robbers, although this girl who led him with such amused assurance seemed hardly to fit into that category.

The passage was nearly a hundred feet long, dimly lighted by small oil lamps and with openings in the wall on either side that had been closed up with the same arrangement of hides stretched on wickerwork as served for a door at the entrance. But at the end it turned and brought up abruptly at a wooden door that offered the first real suggestion of wealth and splendor. Surely it never belonged to that fort; it had been brought from elsewhere recently, and it looked older than the fort itself; it was made of teak and deeply carved with pantheistic Hindu symbols—a strange door with which to bar the way to Moslem secrets.

A cord passed through a small hole in the doorpost; the girl pulled it, ringing a deep sounding gong. The door opened and again there was a flood of red light. This time there were two women, one on each side of the door, but Gup hardly noticed them. Facing him, on a magnificent teak chair that resembled a throne, with her bare feet on a tigerskin rug and a naked sword across her knees, sat a woman less than thirty years of age, fair haired, wearing silken Moslem trousers and a robe of gold and crimson like a Moslem emperor's. Her turban was crimson and gold with a diamond brooch. Her other jewelry looked priceless but there was not too much of it—one ring on each hand, one bracelet on each wrist, a chain of diamonds and gold beads on her neck. Her eyes were sky blue, something like McLeod's own, and they were exactly wide enough apart, and deep and big enough to fix attention on them, and to stare without seeming to stare.

The door closed and Gup bowed without speaking. For a moment his eyes appraised the splendor of the square room. He was conscious of a vague perfume that he had never before smelled. Then his eyes met hers again and he watched the slow smile of her lips that stirred in him alternate waves of wonder and resentment. Hers was not exactly a possessive smile, but it was loaded with daring and self-reliance that outweighed the suggestion of generosity. Her mouth he had seen on ancient Egyptian sculpture—proud and yet promising unfathomable wealth of favors to whoever could pass the scrutiny of the wisdom laden eyes. She was no Indian woman, that was certain; her nose was almost Greek in its classical outline and her skin was more softly fair than a rain kissed Irish girl's.

"So you are he whom Rahman recommended," she said presently, in a strong low voice that hinted honey without offering it. "I won't ask your pardon for this interruption to your plans, because I think you came of your free will, didn't you? I am the Ranee of Jullunder."

"I never heard of you," Gup answered, chivalry in one part of his brain, suspicion in the other.

She laughed, toying with the bare sword on her knees.

"You shall hear now, if you will have patience. Won't you be seated?"

There were several women in the room, none veiled, all dressed as Moslems in embroidered silk, although two of them looked like Europeans; one of those placed a heavy chair where Gup McLeod might sit and face his hostess. The other watched him. He accepted the chair and sat drumming with his fingernails on carved teak.

"May I offer you whisky and soda? Wine? You are not hungry?"

He shook his head and there was a minute's silence.

"What would you do," she asked suddenly, "if you were deprived of all your rights without legal process, and without any reason except some one's hatred of you?"

The question was so unexpected that he hesitated. However, he saw no harm in it.

"I would fight," he answered.

"How would you fight?"

"I don't know. But I would fight as long as I had breath. And I would invent resources if I hadn't any."

"Then you will sympathize with me."

"Not necessarily." He drew on caution. "There are things that I wouldn't do, which perhaps you might do."

"Does this sword suggest that I am bloodthirsty? It was my father's. He was an Irishman. He fought at Kandahar under Roberts and at Omdurman under Hector Macdonald. He, too, was deprived of his rights. He was shot in Dublin for resenting the behavior of Black-and-Tans."

"There were probably two sides to that," Gup retorted. He had been in the mess in Dublin, knew what difficulties governments must face on the spur of an awkward moment.

HE WAS studying her intently, puzzled by her at least superficial knowledge of his own reactions to arbitrary authority. It was clear to him that she was planning her questions deliberately to stir his readiest emotion. Her next words, whether they were true or not, were cunning:

"I hold this sword to remind me that come what may, and no matter what injustice I suffer, I must always fight fairly. That is not invariably easy for a woman to remember. Some of the rules that men call fair are so ridiculous. But as long as the best men obey them, I will do that too."

"But why did you wish to speak to me?" Gup asked her.

"Because information led me to believe you are a man of courage and strong opinions, in search of an occupation that you can follow without losing self-respect."

"And the source of your information?"

"It would take too long to tell you that now, but I have spies spread all through India. And spies in London. And spies in New York—Paris—many places."

"What is the occupation you suggest?"

"That of commander-in-chief."

"Of what army?"

"Mine."

"You mean in Jullunder?"

She laughed again; it was throatily musical, stirring, unforced, genuine. She laughed because she really had known despair and overcome it.

"Did I say I am the Ranee of Jullunder? Habit! I *was* the Ranee of Jullunder. The Rajah, my husband, died and in his will, with the consent of the *dewan* and council, he appointed me his sole heiress and successor to the throne, as he had the right to do. Many a previous Rajah of Jullunder had done that. Some of the best rulers of Jullunder have been women. But the Indian government would not permit me to rule—I suppose because I am partly Irish and partly South African English-Dutch. They put one of the late Rajah's distant relatives on the throne—a drunken idiot, who spends most of his time in Paris when he isn't trying to recover his squandered health in a sanitarium."

"Do you propose that I should help you to retake Jullunder?" Gup asked, as much amused by the absurdity of the suggestion as by any one's supposing he would lend himself to political violence.

She laughed again, and Gup could not help liking her. A laugh is more revealing than a thousand words when it comes unguarded.

"If you are the man I think you are, why should I wish to destroy you by sending you on such a foolish venture?" she retorted. "Do you realize to what extent I am proposing to trust you? To obtain your services I must tell my story. Having revealed my plans, should I not be at your mercy? Could you not betray me to the Indian government?"

"I could," said Gup, "and I will if that should seem to me the decent thing to do."

"How wonderful, that you should say decent and not proper. You mean, you will do what is becoming to a gentleman of independent character and fearless decision?"

"I won't commit myself to anything in advance," he answered. "You must use your own judgment. Trust me or not, as you see fit."

"No, that is not fair. What I propose to discuss with you is treasonable in the opinion of the Indian government. It is as treasonable as George Washington's plans were, or as Cromwell's or Napoleon's. It is as treasonable as the Irish struggle for a free state, as lawless as Lafayette's adventure in America, as dangerous as Bolivar's uprising against Spain. One word said too soon, to the wrong man, and I shall end my days in prison, unless hanged or shot."

"Then why not keep silence?" he suggested.

"Because, like any other leader, I need lieutenants."

"I am nobody's lieutenant," Gup retorted. "I have seen through all that foolishness of sheep being led by sheep, to be fleeced and then slaughtered without a day of dignity or even a vestige of humor."

"Somebody must lead."

"Lead whom? Nobody shall lead me. I tell you I have seen through it. Nowadays a crowd is told that it votes and is therefore responsible for anything that happens. But things haven't changed. Somebody yells a lot of platitudes and one good catchword. Corruption, carnage, loot, the inevitable sequence. I go it alone."

"Exactly."

She pounced on his last four words, but there was nothing catlike about it. And he noticed she was being studiously careful not to stir in him the slightest recognition of her charms; wherein she was wise; she could have found no swifter means than sex appeal of turning against her the full tide of his combativeness.

"You go it alone. I know you do. Rahman saw that. So did a dozen others. So you are not a spy for any government, not a tale bearer, not a stool pigeon, not a sneak. You can listen to me without a sense of obligation to tell the Indian government what I tell you. You can decently promise to tell no one. You can keep my secret whether you agree with me or not."

"Yes," he said. "But I don't agree to be your lieutenant or to help you in any way whatever."

"I am looking at your jawbone and your lips and eyes. You would keep my secret even under torture."

"They don't torture people nowadays."

"Don't they? Wait until you have heard me. Did you ever meet a certain Major Glint? I see you did. If Major Glint should have you thrown in prison, and should heap infamies on you, and slander you so that your name was forever blackened—and should then send to you a cunning impostor to pose as your friend with a pretended plan to ruin Major Glint by telling all the truth, thus at the same time restoring your own good name—would you tell?"

"I have said I will not tell."

"And if Major Glint's spies should pretend to be brigands and should catch you and put you to torture, would you tell then?"

"I don't think even Glint would do that."

"His men have often done it with his knowledge. Would you tell under torture?"

"I don't know. Nobody can answer that. I have never faced physical torture except in war, when wounded, and that was different."

"You notice I have made no threat?"

"It hadn't occurred to me. Why should you?"

"If I thought you were a weak man or a liar I would introduce you to the men who would avenge me in the event of betrayal. They would follow, if necessary, to the end of the world to punish a man who gave me his pledge and broke it."

"That thought leaves me unembarrassed."

"So it should. I have decided I will tell you. But it is morning. Will you join me at breakfast? I wish to talk to you alone, where not even my women can overhear."

Gup McLeod stood up and faced her, hands behind him.

"Yes," he said, "I accept the Moslem thought about that. I will eat your salt, therefore I may not betray you, lest I lose my soul in hell. But remember, I have made you no promise of help of any sort whatever, stated or implied."

He knew the reason why he made that speech. It was that discipline, convention, common sense, tradition, sense of the proprieties and fear all warned him he should turn his back on the woman and ride away. Slight, in a sense, though it was, it was his first act of genuine rebellion.

Then dangerous new courses, to his gaze
By light of inward anger, through the lens
Projected of bewilderment, amaze
Until he wonders at his own and other men's
Long loyalty to ruts of ready made,
Time rotted rule. These new ways lure
Until he sees them deadly. Then, afraid,
He turns, so safe the old were and so sure.

CHAPTER V

"HOW FAR TO THE NORTHWARD OF THIS PLACE DOES THE KING'S WRIT RUN?"

SHE LED into a room that looked like an ancient armory, but the racks and hooks on the walls had been hung with Bokhara curtains and there was a probably priceless Persian rug on the flagstone floor. There was no window; fresh air entered through holes roughly pierced and covered with silk gauze to keep out insects; a smaller door led to a pantry and kitchen, and there was one woman—deaf and dumb as it developed—who came and went like an automaton.

A table had been laid for two, with marvelous linen and porcelain, flowers on the table, fruit, and such coffee as only rarely greets men's nostrils except in company where cooking and philosophy are parts of the same thing. There were candles, and by their light as he sat down facing her, McLeod could read those blue eyes better than he had done, and interpret the curve of her full, yet not exactly sensuous lips. He decided she was not unlike himself in some respects, which was to say she would be difficult to dissuade from a chosen course. He decided, too, that she was the handsomest woman he had ever seen, but that made him all the more cautious.

"You suspect me, of course, of being the commonest sort of adventuress," she began, "and if you omitted the common you would be almost right. I can't help my heredity. In fact, I'm proud of it. We all have to live what is born in us or else waste our lives, and I detest waste more than I do cruelty. At times it seems impossible to avoid cruelty, whereas waste is simply laziness that benefits no one. In the old days I was Lottie Carstairs."

"Oh!"

Gup suddenly remembered now the actress who in two seasons had laughed and sung her way into the hearts of London, and then had so unaccountably vanished and been forgotten. There had been nothing in the papers about her marrying a rajah, and it must have needed something like a miracle to procure that silence. He remembered her song about "Up in the morning early", that all England had whistled and hummed. She had started something like a craze for early rising, with the result that servants in suburban households had been harder to retain than ever and there had even been an editorial in the *Times* about it.

"I, too, have worshipped," he said simply, and she smiled acknowledgment. He remembered the smile now—inimitable—wondered why he had not noticed it before.

"Did you know that Jullunder was a lineal descendant of the Emperor Akbar? By a junior wife, but direct descent. He inherited many of Akbar's qualities—all of the best ones and one of the worst, if ambition is bad. He was wild to make Jullunder prosperous; he wanted to see it the best governed state in the world, and he was not above wanting to enlarge its borders, either. You know, it's only a two-by-four state, hardly larger than an English county, but well populated and potentially rich."

Gup nodded.

"Good *saises*—horse attendants—come from Jullunder."

"And good swordsmen, good, sturdy yeomen, good upstanding men of their word, who look you in the eye and judge for themselves whether they will follow you or not," she retorted.

"I sit rebuked."

"Jullunder saw my act in London and sent his card backstage. It was a long time before I would meet him, but a friend arranged it finally. I won't pretend I fell in love with him, but I did fall in love with his splendid ideas and I have never for one split second regretted having married him. If ever a man and woman were companions with one united purpose to keep our minds off trivialities, he and I were. It was up to me to get used to Oriental customs, and I did. It was up to me to turn my back on old ties and associations, and I did that too.

"It was up to him to make concessions to my race, habits, prejudices, ignorance, and he did. He never failed once. We dreamed, worked, rode together, encouraging and finding fault with people, helping where we could and preventing hardship where we could, until I knew every mountain and valley and stream in Jullunder and might almost say I knew the name of every headman in the state. I was known as the ranee who laughs and sings."

"I remember hearing of it."

Gup was hardly conscious of food on the table. A wave of emotion had swept over him such as he had not felt since the early days of the war, something that seemed to have swept him into an unknown orbit wherein impossibilities did not exist. However, he made no effort to explain it to himself, perhaps for fear he might resist it. For the moment he swam with the tide.

"Go on," he said. "I'm listening."

"WE SOON grew enormously wealthy. Not that our income was particularly big, but we used it wisely. We purchased stocks in the United States, always buying and hardly ever selling, only selling in order to buy something better managed that had better prospects. When the war came all our stocks went up through a hole in the sky. They were all in my name. I am probably one of the richest women in the world."

"I pity you."

"You need not. Money is the means to do things. However, the war brought us our share of sadness. We equipped a corps of transport troops, self-contained, able to protect itself to a certain extent. It was sent to Mesopotamia, where the men died like rats, mainly of dirt and neglect. When additional troops were asked for we did what we could, but our main effort was already spent, thrown away, wasted. Then Jullunder died. They said he died of pneumonia, but I know better. Does shame and a broken heart mean anything to you?"

"Shame, yes," Gup answered. "But I have a heart that won't break. I wish it could. I've done my best to break it."

"Major Glint came on the scene then. He got himself appointed political agent. It was really he who vetoed my succession. I believe the Indian government would have confirmed it but for him. He hunted up that rotter—Jullunder's second cousin—and I know what happened to Glint's bank account in London, although the payment was made so craftily that it would be difficult to prove anything; besides, that was wartime, when officials were too busy for that sort of investigation. Jullunder's second cousin was appointed rajah and I was dumped into the discard, but not before Glint had interviewed me and had dropped a few hints. I understood his hints. I made the mistake of not bribing him. I should have bribed him. He would have been at my mercy then. As it was, he was afraid he had said too much and had made a too dangerous enemy. He began to try to drive me out of India."

"Why didn't you go?" Gup asked her. But he knew that he himself would not have gone. "There are lots of other countries where money can pauperize people and give you a sense of superiority."

"I thought of it. But I don't like defeat. I mean I don't like to admit it. And—perhaps I'm wrong, but I despise laziness and I don't want my money to help to make any one lazy. I thought, too, of my sense of superiority. I have it. I don't need to create it or to strengthen it. I know I have more ability than most people have; and ability is magic; it makes you sick unless you use it."

"Why not marry another rajah?" Gup suggested, as deliberately rude, for caution's sake, as he could force himself to be.

"I could have—a twenty-one gun man with a territory ten times the size of Jullunder. But he had no genius and only wanted to be lazy with my money. I hate rotters of any kind; they're nothing but a waste of human life."

He attacked her again, but with words not quite so barbed with bitterness—

"And I suppose all that money was burning a hole in your patience?"

"It was. I began to make use of it. In a sense it was India's money, although I made it elsewhere. I began to finance the so-called patriots who pretend to be seeking India's independence. I had to do it secretly, which led to my organizing a very intricate network of spies and agents. I have a sort of genius for choosing men; most of the men I choose turn out to be what I think they are. But the leaders of the independence movement were not men of my choosing, and I soon learned they were a mixture of incompetents and scoundrels looking for their own personal advantage or else too crazy to be worth attention.

"I don't refer to Ghandi—he's an angel and exactly as much use as any other angel would be. Two or three other good men worked themselves to death or died with broken hearts. The others, well, a Hindu would rather scrag a Moslem than go to work; and a Moslem would rather put a Hindu to indignity than agree with him that twice two are four. I had to choose. I chose the Moslems."

"Why? They're as crazy as any one else and they haven't produced a civilization of their own worth mentioning since the Moors invaded Spain."

"They have more backbone than the others. They are less broadminded, but they know how to unite. I need united rifles at my back."

"They haven't rifles."

"In India, no. But north of the border, yes. Do you begin to see now what I'm planning?"

Gup saw too well. He nodded. He began to feel uncomfortable. Though a man leave all that he has, and renounce allegiance to the flag under which he has fought with valor, and though he do so from the highest motive, he shall none the less be disturbed by the news of another doing it. Gup never had renounced allegiance. He had only fretted at the mediocrity to which it tied him. A revulsion of feeling swept over him and he began to lean the other way. Nevertheless, he decided to hear the story to a finish.

"Go on," he said.

"North of the border is no man's land," she went on. "The tribes have neither chiefs nor central government. The governments of India and Afghanistan have used them as a sort of buffer state. Why? Because neither side could conquer them. They would have been conquered long ago if it were possible, but they are splendid fighting men and their country is almost inaccessible to armies. Are they civilized? No. Why? Because it has pleased other people to keep them uncivilized for strategic reasons. Are they armed? Yes, for the most part with modern rifles. Have they plenty of ammunition? Yes, because I saw to that; money will buy anything, and there were millions of rounds of rifle ammunition left after the war that nobody knew what to do with, and that almost any one would sell, whether or not he owned it. I bought and the tribes have; that is that."

"And you trust me with that information?"

"Why not? You are a sane men, not a jingo; you can see straight. How far to the northward of Peshawar, or of this place, does the King's writ run? They might shoot or hang me for doing it if I were caught, but haven't I a perfect right to deal with the tribes as I please?

"I should not have had that right if they had accepted me as Ranee of Jullunder; but they broke their own treaties and their own law, as well as the ancient law of the state of Jullunder, when they turned me out and even confiscated some of my personal property. I am no more beholden to such a government. If it has the power to restrain me, well and good. If it has the wit to suspect what I am doing, that is my misfortune. But if not—are you such a man as would betray me to a government that has broken every promise it ever made?"

McLEOD writhed. No governments keep promises, except in exchange for votes or money. Human rule means human fear, stupidity and weakness, with a little virtue added if the voters are awake. He himself had cursed all rulers but he knew that almost any government is better than such anarchy as savages with rifles can produce.

"Some promises," he answered, "are impossible to keep."

"Yes," she said, "and the moves of destiny are impossible to prevent. What if the tribes beyond the frontier—the Pathan, the Afridi, the Mohmand, the Shinwari, the Orakzai—what if the tribes who overlook the Khyber, and half of Afghanistan—what if they should invite me to be their leader? Has any one the right to say no? And if I accept, has any one the right to call me a traitor?"

"After that, what?" he demanded.

"I was a civilizing influence in Jullunder."

He stared at her, resentment growing. That was her first shade of equivocation and it touched off the explosive in him that was never difficult to reach.

"If you don't care to tell me the truth," he retorted, "I'll go now. You are not thinking of civilization. You are planning to invade India."

"What of it? Can you tell me of a single instance, in the whole course of history, where a people has won independence without war? Can you tell me of one civilization that had a chance to be born until its progenitors proved their mettle? Were the Scots weaned on sweet words, or bitter fighting? Did the Irish win their independence by bullets, or blarney? Was the United States suckled at a dove's breast, or an eagle's? How about Germany, France, England? How about the states of South America? Mexico, South Africa, Italy?"

"Yes. But why should you interfere?"

She looked straight at his eyes and the ancient Egyptian look, so noticeable about her mouth, seemed suddenly to strengthen her entire face, making it ruthless and yet good humored, although more proud than pride itself.

"Because destiny commands!"

"I have heard of others who believed they could read destiny," he sneered.

"You are thinking of Napoleon and William Hohenzollern. I prefer to think of Joan of Arc, Bolivar, LaFayette, Garibaldi, Boadicea, Tamerlane, Genghis Khan—or of any of the countless foreigners who have lent their swords to the evolving universe! I would even rather think of Byron." She paused a moment. "Do you think I am utterly selfish? Do you think I am afraid to die?"

"I think you are mad," he answered.

The sky blue eyes looked full and straight at him again.

"Has no one accused you of being mad?"

He bit his lip, not knowing what to say to her. She evidently knew the nature of his own experience; it would be no use talking platitudes or pretending he felt loyal to established institutions. He hated to be illogical; it was better to say nothing. He rose to his feet.

"If you'll excuse me—"

"You refuse?"

She laughed at him; and again he knew her laughter was not bravado. It was based on something that she knew and that he did not know; he recognized that, without imagining what trump she could have up her sleeve. And she maddened him by not playing her trump.

"Some day soon," she said, "you will be like MacMahon; and like Napoleon I shall have to wonder whether I can trust you within the sound of bagpipes! You are going? Very well. I feel quite sure I can trust you not to betray my confidence."

He bowed and strode out of the room, not glancing back. What need? There was a picture of her in his mind that could never fade. She was a woman among women and her words would burn him to his dying day, because they were the logical extension of his own words and his own thoughts that had brought him at such loggerheads with the established order. He would let that be a lesson to him—no more rebellion, come what might! But what a woman! What a life he and she could have led if it had been his destiny to know her and fall in love with her before she met her rajah.

But now, he supposed, she was ruined, too far gone along the road from which there is no turning back. He thought then bitterly of destiny, whose cheap trick had let him see her in London, across the footlights, when she was caroling and laughing until London threw its hats at her and turned the stage into a wilderness of costly flowers—then brought him face to face with her again in such a place as this, amid such circumstances. What if he had known and loved her in the London days, instead of wasting his ideals on the light headed fool whom he married? Would it have come to this pass? He believed not. Was it his own fault that he had not been awake in those days? Are we all shown our opportunity and then let alone to seize or leave it? Was destiny mocking him—and her? If so, he thought not much of destiny, thought no more highly of it than of certain of the claws and fangs of human government that he had cursed in bitterness of soul.

The same girl who had admitted him now led him forth again along the passage. She, too, although she said no word, appeared to be in no doubt of the outcome of the interview; she smiled with a kind of confidential approval, as much as to say that this was no more than a beginning of acquaintance. So he supposed she had not been listening through curtains, since otherwise she would have known that it was goodby.

At the outer door the same Pathan was standing, heavy from lack of sleep but jovial and full of swagger.

"*Huzur, salaam aleikum!* Praised be the Prophet, may Allah grant at last thou art the man! It is a nightlong weariness of heart to serve a woman, but a strong man's face is daybreak!"

"Peace, fool!"

Rahman came into the passage, red eyed, too, with wakefulness, masking curiosity, if such he had, beneath an air of gruff impatience.

"*Huzur*, we should make haste, if your Honor pleases. If we dally, we may be seen; and if we are seen, Allah pity us!"

* * *

Now mark him, lion-like in sullen mood
Upon his own spoor turning, visioning his den
Well hidden in the zone familiar where brood
Old enemies but no new danger. Then
There meet him, like sly hunters who pursue
To have no more of him within their zone,
Old unslain ghosts. So at the ghosts he knew
He hurls his newborn hate of the Unknown.

CHAPTER VI

"IT IS VERY SELDOM WISE TO RUN AWAY, BY GOD!"

GUP McLEOD mounted the black stallion and reached for the rein of Rahman's horse that was protesting against a cold saddle so violently that Rahman could not come near enough to get a foot into the stirrup.

He deliberately memorized his bearings, his blue, far seeing eyes scanning the line of the hills and making note of distances. Then he turned in the saddle to study the grass grown mound that overlay the ruin, fixing it in mind until he knew that he could recognize it in the dark.

It was all one to Gup McLeod that Rahman watched him with sleepy interest, like a cat with one eye open; it suited his mood to let the Afghan know how carefully he mapped the landscape in his mind. He defied suspicion, defied everything except his own right to govern himself. He even turned inquisitor, lest Rahman should think him afraid to be curious.

"Where is the man who rode last night with us? What was his name—Pepul Das?"

"He has an errand," Rahman answered. Then, as if to fall in with McLeod's mood, "It is an errand that concerns your Honor's business."

He drew no response. Gup's personal affairs, at the moment, were beneath consideration; he could think of nothing less interesting. But the Afghan's curiosity was rising as his blood flowed more freely with the movement of the good horse under him. And there was never a hunter of men who did not relish the prospect that he who has been hunted shall know afterward, and understand, who hunted him, and how.

"There are your Honor's tents and servants, and a horse or two."

No answer.

"There is he with the teeth to be considered—Glint with the heart of a jackal and such teeth as no hyena has. Pepul Das plays fox to the jackal."

No response. Abominably tawdry were the threads of circumstance that Glint thought so important. He began to marvel at the subtlety of destiny that could use Glint's meanness like a trigger in the mechanism that had lifted Lottie Carstairs to a throne, taught her the feel of power, and then turned her loose to discover what outlawry means. Insufferably self-important and abysmally ignominious Glint, a tool of destiny! A cockroach causing the death of possibly a hundred thousand men! It might easily cost that number to persuade a headstrong woman of the error of her way. So a cockroach in the infinite design is as important as the rest of us? But what a mess! What a blood hungry monster this destiny is that schools the actors, sets the stage and looks on. Rahman again:

"Now a man is by nature a fool, and a jackal is restless—so that Glint is a restless fool. A spy, he must be fed by lesser spies, or he would grow lonely and might learn wisdom—which Allah forbid. If he were wise he might be dangerous. And if he knew not where to find your Honor, he might make haste and seize your Honor's tents, which would be inconvenient. We took care; but informers may have told him whither the tents were taken. It was thought wise to protect the tents by sending Pepul Das to betray to him the place where your Honor will rest at midday. Thus he will pursue your Honor and not seize the tents. And your Honor may either avoid him or—"

He drew response at last. A sudden wave of anger so swept over Gup McLeod that the stallion felt it and snatched at the reins, to be off at full gallop. It needed a minute of iron will and horsemanship to rein him in. Then Gup turned savagely on Rahman, speaking almost gently because the violence was in the spirit of the words—

"Would you mind telling me a reason why I should avoid Glint?"

Rahman looked another way a moment. Allah loves hunters of men, but it is seldom wise to let the hunted see the laughter in the eyes of him whom Allah loves. Then presently:

"He is an enemy, who never in his life forgave what he reckoned to be an insult. And being mean, he measures insults with a silversmith's scale, weighing grams. Where you and I would scratch ourselves, as at a flea bite, he feels the rust of a murderer's dagger in his veins. Such as might stagger you or me, *huzur*, because a great man meant it, would pass him by because he is too mean to understand. Your Honor insulted him. If it were my own *tamasha*—mixup—I would avoid him as I do a leper."

"Suit yourself," Gup answered. "If you see him coming you can escape, if that's what troubles you. Swap horses, if you wish. If you think he has it in for you for anything, he might recognize this stallion as yours and seize him."

Rahman looked aside again to recover control of his eyes. Behind the silent laughter of those men of the North there is always gratitude; and though they are few who understand that, they are many who can see it and become suspicious. It is safer to look greedy.

"I am your Honor's escort," he answered after a moment, with quiet dignity.

THEREAFTER for awhile they rode in silence, Gup not troubling about direction, leaving that to Rahman; only he made note of it, observing that Dera Ismail Khan was almost on their right hand. He supposed his tents and other belongings had been hidden in the bottom of some *nullah* and that Rahman would lead him straight to them unless Glint should show up. It would be difficult for Glint to cross that open country unseen and, as the hours wore on, he began to believe that the whole Glint business was a false alarm. The man was only a mean busybody. Why waste thought on him?

So he thought of Lottie Carstairs, the ex-Ranee of Jullunder, sitting with a naked sword across her knees and offering him high command of an army that he supposed existed still in her imagination. Not that he doubted she could raise an army. Given money and imagination—and the moment—almost any one can do that; but he doubted she could do it without the fact being known. If she already had an army it was beyond belief that she could restrain it—not an army of Hillmen raised for the purpose of upsetting boundaries and trampling on established law. It would have been up to the eyes in plunder long ago, and long ago defeated by the massed gas batteries and airplanes.

No, she had no army yet. She had offered to make him commander-in-chief of a dream, with the job on his hands of materializing dream into reality. He wondered what man she would find for the job. Too bad he had not suggested Glint to her. He almost laughed at his own lame cynicism. Then:

"Have a care!" said Rahman. "Rein him in, *huzur*, he takes a rough descent like this too eagerly."

So Gup McLeod let Rahman lead down a goat track to the bottom of a dry ravine, where scrubby tamarisks rose head high of a man on horseback and the kites in a clearing were picking a dead sheep's bones. There was no room to have turned; where Rahman halted there were rocks on either hand and Gup could just see over Rahman's shoulder, between tamarisks, the yellow pony beside which Glint was standing with the reins looped over his arm. Then Glint's voice, nasty with the ring of triumph:

"*Mis*-ter McLeod, I think! I have a summons for you. You may come, too, Rahman. I arrest you without warrant."

"Pull aside!" Gup ordered. "Let me through!"

He spurred the stallion, making him plunge into the tamarisks, forcing his way between them and Rahman's horse. He almost rode Glint down. He forced him backward into a circular wide patch of naked gravel where Glint's servants waited—three men on native ponies, unarmed. Glint had a revolver but he made no bluff at using it.

"What sort of paper have you?" Gup demanded.

"Simply a summons to begin with. There will be something more serious later, unless you see the error of your ways. I went to the personal trouble of serving this on you, first, to give you opportunity to apologize to me for last night's insult; second, to give you a talking to, for your own good."

"What's the summons for?" Gup asked him.

"For assault, for a vicious assault, and on my servant as it happens."

"When?"

"Last night, of course. You know that without asking."

"You mean you accuse me of having struck your servant?"

"Yes."

"Any witnesses? Who?"

"The servant, myself and another."

"So. You saw me do it? You propose to swear to that?"

Gup stared at the three native servants, wondering why Glint had brought no troopers with him—no police—no armed men. He knew Glint was not a fighter of the sort who faces enemies lone handed. Was there an ambush, constables in hiding, ready to make an arrest when Glint provoked an attempt at violence? That would be Glint's way. But the voice of Rahman, who had ridden up knee to knee with him, whispered—

"Pepul Das has seen that there are no policemen near."

Glint heard whispering, but not the words.

"You may consider it clever to whisper secrets to an Afghan horsethief in my presence, but the apology you owe me would be better manners and far safer for yourself," he sneered.

He was a man who could not keep his venom blanketed. The scorn in Gup McLeod's eyes, being genuine, aroused all Glint's hatred of a man more honorable than himself.

Then Rahman laughed and Glint, who hated to be laughed at more than to be detected cheating, said one word too much for anybody's peace. But McLeod began it, choosing his words because of dim suspicion now that Rahman, with the aid of Pepul Das, had staged this meeting. Rahman was too un-self-conscious in appearance to be altogether innocent of guile.

"I did not whip your servant," Gup said simply.

"Why lie about it?" Glint asked. "Try that on the court if you have witnesses to back you up."

"Do you intend to swear you saw me do it?"

"Certainly."

Gup passed his reins to Rahman. He had no whip, but Glint had. He leaped from the saddle and seized that whip. He took Glint by the tunic collar and began to thrash him mercilessly. Glint shouted something about the king's name, but Gup's heel was grinding the king's summons into the gravel bed and he had no respect that moment for any law except the oldest one of personal chastisement, nor any thought except that he would not hurt the man too much, since he was after all only a rotter. But the mounted servants tried to interfere, and Rahman held them at bay with voice and riding whip. Then Glint made an incredible mistake. He tried to shoot. He pulled his Colt out of the holster and had it cocked before McLeod saw what was happening. Then the whip came down on the back of Glint's hand with a blow like the smack of a meat seller's ax. The revolver hit the gravel; McLeod kicked it in among the tamarisks; and thereafter he laid on the whip without one thought other than that Glint should know he had been whipped, and what for.

"You abominable reptile! This is for spying and lying and then attempting murder!"

MEN LIKE Glint, who have lived by treachery, think inevitably of a threat when weapons fail. And being desperate, they load their threat with the deepest secret slug they had held in reserve.

"You'd better stop! I'll get you for it! Ow! Help, somebody! Damn you, I know your doings! You're in league with the ex-Ranee of Jullunder! You've been with her all night! I'll jail you—I'll break you—I'll hang you for it! You're killing me, you—"

"You have done enough," said Rahman. "Slay a louse, *huzur*, but let that vermin live. He has his uses."

Gup wondered why an Afghan should recommend mercy. The race is not notorious for mercy or restraint in anger. But he let Glint fall on to the gravel and lie sobbing, let Glint's three servants come and offer clumsy first aid. Then he saw the crumpled summons that his heel had ground into the gravel. Then he looked at Glint's torn uniform and at those three witnesses who had seen the thrashing—doubtless all three ready to swear that he had thrashed Glint's other servant under the fly of the tent the night before. Then he looked into Rahman's eyes and understood, in part at any rate.

"This is your doing!"

"By Allah, no, *huzur*. I am not so good at an intrigue. But we are outlaws, you and I!"

"You—and Pepul Das—"

"*Huzur*, that fellow owns no cunning that could—"

"By whose orders? Did the Ranee of Jullunder order this?"

"By Allah, none knows that woman's secrets. But I know that your Honor stands high in her favor. She is also an outlaw. Better follow me, *huzur*, to where an outlaw's trail is easy but pursuit is hard!"

Gup glared at him. The trap had grown obvious. He was almost in a panic. Rahman read him like a book.

"It is very seldom wise to run away, by God. And why run from a woman?"

"You may tell that woman to go to hell!" Gup answered.

"Heaven and hell," said Rahman, "are the province of the Most High. It is only on earth, *huzur*, that we have our say—in unimportant matters."

But Rahman perceived he must use subtler argument and summon subtler forces to his aid—make magic, as the unbelievers call it, who know no magic. (They who do know use a less polluted word, with a swift glance over their own right shoulder.) He eased the black stallion's rein; and with a toe that Gup could not see he touched the sleek flank. The stallion moved in a half circle, so that he stood behind Gup with his head toward Rahman. In a moment he was lipping at Gup's hair, breathing on his neck. Gup's hand rose to stroke the velvety muzzle, almost unconsciously answering the touch of confidence.

"There is none except yourself, *huzur*, who can restrain that woman on the road she takes," said Rahman.

The stallion snorted friendship into Gup's ear, stuff such as only horses have, so only they can give to men. Pride and price are not in it, nor sentiment in any ordinary sense; there is something wordless that a horse knows, which men do not know, but which horses can stir out of slumber in a man's subconscious mind, so that he reacts a little differently to circumstances than he might do otherwise, which is why a man on horseback is a different creature from the same man on the ground. It is also the reason why they say Mohammed rode to heaven on a horse.

"Let her drive to her own damnation," Gup retorted. "Why should I interfere?"

But the words did not satisfy him. Impulse nagged at him to mount the stallion and ride him beyond the skyline—anywhere. But the stallion was not his, it was the woman's. He did not propose to be beholden to her for anything.

"The police come," Rahman murmured.

"Let 'em!" said Gup.

"And if they take you, they will take me also."

"Your funeral. I didn't ask for this."

"And it may be, we shall both be hanged for seditious practises. That fellow Glint is a marvelous liar. It would be a pity to give him so much satisfaction. Moreover, why run from Allah's jesting? Is it not better to see the end of Allah's jest? Is Glint a friend of God that you await his good pleasure concerning you? Does he who is beset by dogs get on his knees and bite them for the sake of dignity? Why not escape and fight Glint with a better weapon, at the right time, after Allah's jest is finished and the opportunity appears? Do you intend to let that dog bark triumph over both of us?"

"Don't worry. I won't let Glint put us in prison."

"Nevertheless, the police come."

It was true—or perhaps it was true. There was a distant sound of horses galloping and Glint, not willing to appear less than brutally beaten and helpless, sent one of his servants to the top of the far bank of the ravine to make signals. Where his tunic was torn, he tore it more. Where there was blood, he smeared it. He could simulate extreme pain with a realism due to enjoyment of mental and physical pain of other people. He groaned, and restrained the groaning with artistic heroism.

"Find my horses and tents," said Gup.

He never knew exactly why he reached that sudden decision. He knew, the moment he made it, what it meant. He had chosen between the indignity and injustice of arrest and trial with perjured evidence against him, and at least a temporary state of outlawry, with not more than a remote chance even so of being able to clear himself of Glint's charges. He knew Glint would use every malicious means imaginable to compass his ruin, and that flight would be interpreted as confession of guilt.

"I am probably riding to death," he remarked to himself as he mounted Iskander. "Well, the sooner the better." But he had no intention of doing death's work. Let death defeat him if it could. He would give death a run for its money. "Lead on to where you think my horses are," he ordered.

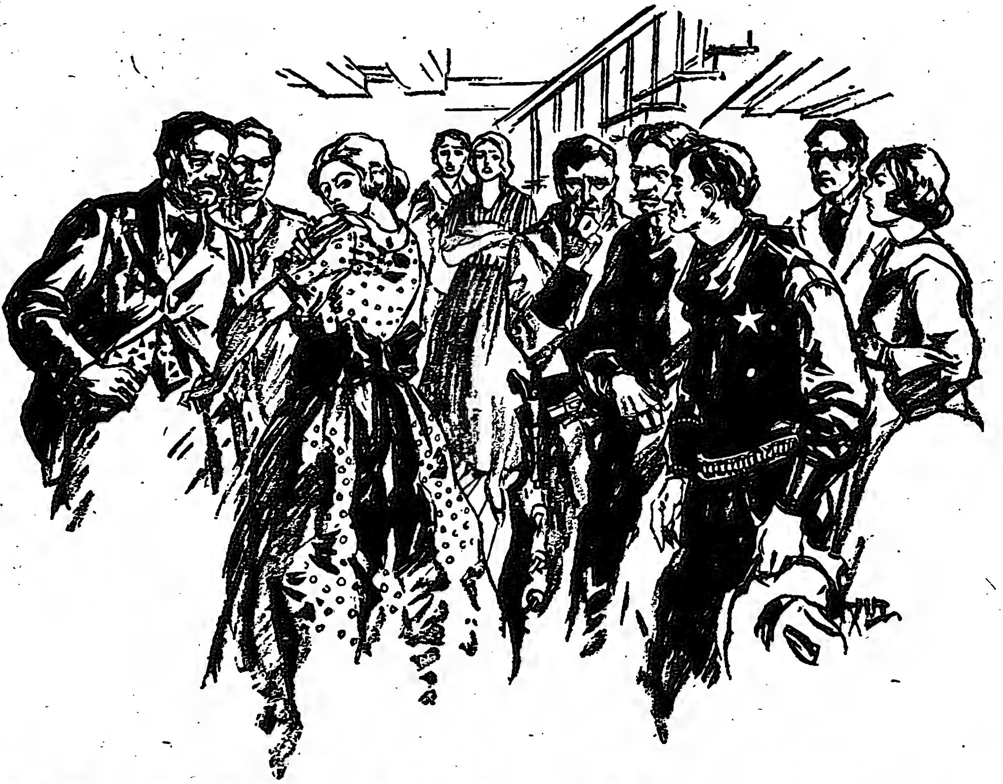
Rahman needed no second invitation. He led at full gallop along the ravine, that wound on its course like a snake, until they reached a track up which they rode to the level land above. And there they had the advantage of a long, low, rounded ridge between them and where Glint lay, so that they could gallop unseen, extended to the limit of their horses' speed. Gup never once looked behind him. There was nothing to look back to that he cared about. He was abandoning his good name; Glint would presently abolish that from off the earth. He must make a new reputation somehow—how would presently transpire, perhaps. Riding that splendid horse, restraining him not to outdistance Rahman's horse, let him forget anxiety.

But as they rode a strange uneasiness crept over him, that at first he made no attempt to analyze, since he suspected it of being fear and he was habitually merciless with himself whenever he thought fear was getting in the thin end of its wedge. Like all men who have turned and faced fear many times, he had learned to spot it swiftly and to kill it in its early stages. So, from familiarity with that enemy, he discovered that this mood was not even fear in disguise. And when he knew what it was, he felt bewildered more than ever.

He was homesick—not for houses; not for individuals. It takes time for that phase to appear. He was homesick for the opposite of what Glint stood for—homesick for the idea that men call flag and country, that such as Glint disgrace, and that stuffy minded people stir the scoundrels and the jingoes to debauch. The discovery so astonished him that he almost drew rein. He had supposed himself totally free from national sentiment. He had thought he fought that strangler to the death in Flanders. Now, though, he knew himself one with his country and only at war with his country's enemies—an outlaw, who still loved his country. Suddenly he knew he loved it with a passion that had driven him half insane with anger at the fools who brought his country into disrepute. He knew now what had been the matter with him—knew it too late. Why he did not draw rein was that once more destiny appeared to him as a sordid tyranny that mocks men's highest aspirations. What was the use of pausing? What was the use of hesitation?

"Lord, what a lousy universe! Is it impossible to see straight and act fairly without bringing down one's own house in ruins?"

TO BE CONTINUED



NO HOLDS BARRED

A Story of the West

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

DONOVAN'S crime was not born in his mind until he reached the foot of the stairs. He had descended from the dance hall to buy some cigarets, without any contemplation of assaulting Garth.

It was the sight of Garth wrapping up a package of money which tempted Donovan. That and the fact that Garth, who was bending over a desk with his back to the stair well, had not seen this latest customer from the frolic upstairs.

Crime was in Donovan. Few who knew him suspected it, but it was there. Deep in his character there was a certain black, blighting blemish which now seeped downward from his brain to contaminate the man's heart, inspiring his hand to crime. He made a guess that there would be all of two thousand dollars in the package Garth was wrapping. He knew Garth had held a sale of merchandise that week. And today was the first of the month, when many customers had very likely come in to pay charge accounts. And Donovan was desperate for money. His ranch on Blue Creek was mortgaged, and the mortgage was overdue.

Temptation swept over the man like a blast from the inferno, and almost before he knew it the thing was done. There was a bottle of soda pop on the counter. Donovan picked it up and moved with catlike tread toward Garth. The noise upstairs—fiddles being tuned between dances and the laughter of a hundred rough ranch folks at play—was all in Donovan's favor. His instantly conceived plan was merely to knock Garth senseless with the pop bottle, hide the package of money, and then to return inconspicuously to the floor of the ballroom overhead.

He reached Garth and struck down with vicious might. The bottle broke, leaving the neck in Donovan's hand. Garth barely groaned. He crumpled, then slithered from his chair; he came to rest prone on the floor at the polished boots of Donovan.

Donovan snatched up the package of money. There was a half completed address on the wrapping. Garth had been in the act, when assaulted from the rear, of addressing the shipment to the Picketwire National Bank of Trinidad, no doubt planning to send it by express. There was no bank in the smallish range town of Trinchera.

Donovan knew with certainty that Garth had not seen his approach. When the merchant came to consciousness he would not be able to identify or accuse his assailant. And now to conceal the money where it could later, without danger, be recovered.

Donovan went to the front door of the store. It was bolted from the inside. Obviously Garth had locked up before taking the currency from the safe to wrap it. Donovan slipped the bolt, opened the door and stepped out on the stoop. It was dark, in fact exactly eleven o'clock at night. Donovan's cue was speedily to hide the package and slip back upstairs to the dance hall.

Next to Garth's store he saw the dark stone shape of the creamery. On the creamery's front platform Donovan made out a row of metal cylinders, all quite alike and each about three feet high. He knew that they were empty ten-gallon cream cans, awaiting return by truck to cream shippers. Sight of them gave Donovan an idea.

For he knew that one of those cream cans was his own. From his Blue Creek ranch Donovan sent in ten gallons of cream each week. Why not? But Donovan had no time to waste in whys and wherefores. He acted. He moved over to the creamery platform. He began examining the markings on the cans. The creamery kept each customer's can distinctly labeled with paint, so that shipments would not be confused and to insure return of empties to the proper owners.

Donovan easily found his own can. Even in the faulty light of night he could read the daubed letters on its metal exterior:

FRANK DONOVAN
ROUTE NO. 1.

He picked the can up, rattled it to make sure it was empty, then yanked off the lid. The container was indeed empty, even washed clean, for the creamery always washed cans after dumping the cream into vats. Donovan now inserted the package of bills within the can. It wedged down tightly, so that it would not rattle. The big galvanized can itself weighed fifteen pounds tare, and thus Donovan was confident that the slight extra weight of the package would not be noticed by the truckman in charge of returning empties.

Donovan restored the lid tightly into place and withdrew. The loot, was his exultant thought, would now take care of itself. It would be delivered to his very door in the ordinary routine of business, when the creamery's truck, on its weekly round over Route 1, left the empty to pick up next week's shipment.

So Donovan, empty handed, withdrew to the Garth establishment next door. The building had two entrances, the store door and the door to a hallway with isolated steps leading up to the Palace

Dance Hall. Donovan did not want to return to the dance via those hallway stairs, because then he would have to pass Pegleg Starrett, who was seated on the top landing to take tickets.

And above all he must return to the dance. In the first place his coat and hat were in the men's cloak room. In the second place to be missed would mean to be suspected. Safety lay in arriving speedily and unseen, and mixing with the crowd.

THUS Donovan re-entered the main door of Garth's store. He closed the door and bolted it from the inside, just as he had found it. He might as well do that, he thought, because Garth would testify upon regaining consciousness that he had bolted up for the night, and that the assailant must therefore have come down through the interior stair well from the ballroom. That point would be conceded at once. Very well, thought Donovan, let them search all of the some fifty male guests at the frolic; they would find no loot on Donovan.

Again, if he left the street door unlocked, investigators would be inclined to look around outside in the street, thus directing the hue and cry to the general environs of the cream can.

Having bolted the door from the inside, Donovan moved warily toward the foot of the interior stair well. The store was lighted by a ceiling oil lamp. In the lambent glow of this Donovan saw the prone form of Garth, lying exactly as it had fallen.

There was a fixed stare to Garth's eyes which brought fright to Donovan. Were those eyes glazing in death? Had he struck too hard with the pop bottle? Donovan stooped to feel of Garth's heart. It seemed to be pulsing, though faintly. There was a creeklet of blood trailing across Garth's face, dribbling from the grayish hairs of his head and disappearing under the celluloid collar at his throat. Donovan realized that the pop bottle had broken Garth's scalp.

But whether Garth was dead, dying or merely knocked out, Donovan felt a tumultuous urge to get clear of his crime. He arose and hurried on to the stair well. From the floor above he could again hear the tuning of instruments and the hilarity of guests. But there was yet no shuffle of dancing feet. Donovan reflected that his entire truancy from the ballroom had not consumed more than the five minute interval between dances.

What if they saw him dodging in from the vestibule at the top of the stairs? In that case he would merely report the finding of Garth, prone and unconscious, and claim that the assault had occurred prior to his own descent. He knew that men, singly and in pairs, had been descending to the store off and on all evening, to buy cigarets or soda pop. Any such customer might have made the assault.

Donovan ascended the stairs softly. It would be far safer, of course, if he could enter unseen. He reached the vestibule above. Just as he did so he heard the orchestra strike up the next dance. He heard the voice of Bob Miller, master of ceremonies, shout:

"Join hands in a circle, ladies and gents. This 'n's gonna be a grand right and left."

There was applause, followed by the scuffling of feet. Donovan stepped quickly from the vestible into the ballroom.

His eyes were wide open, alert to observe whether any one happened to be looking his way. Luck was with him, because all the company was facing the center, individually scrambling for places in a big circle.

All the company, that is, except a few who were not dancing. Such an exception was the tall, pink cheeked and blue eyed deputy sheriff, Ed Kane, who was engaged near the orchestra platform in intimate gossip with a stockman named Buck Perry.

Across the room, at the door giving to the hall stairs which was the true guest entrance to the dance hall, sat old Pegleg Starrett, the ticket taker. Starrett's wooden leg was propped on a table and he was half asleep. His stance was such as to block exit or entrance at the upper hall vestibule. He would certainly be able to testify, thought Donovan, that no one had used his exit in the last ten minutes.

All this while Donovan was moving forward to join the circle of guests. It was vital for him to be seen dancing. He had not missed a dance all evening. He certainly did not mean to miss this one.

So Donovan crowded into a position on the circumference of the human circle, joining fingers with a lady on either side of him. He heard Bob Miller bawl lustily:

"Grand right and left! Gents to the right and ladies to the left!"

The orchestra banged into "Turkey In The Straw".

All men, including Donovan, began weaving to the right. The ladies took counter direction, threading through the men. Donovan pivoted the first girl he passed, passing to her left; weaving, he passed to the right of the next, to the left of the next, and so on, touching fingers in each case, first with his right hand, then with his left. He was half way around the hall when Bob Miller called—

"Two-step all!"

Whereupon each gentleman grasped that particular lady with whom he happened to be in contact at the instant, and began two-stepping. Such a set as this, known as a circle dance, is a veritable lottery of partners. At the Trinchera frolics it was the custom to have the original circle contain one more gentleman than ladies, which always left one male partnerless after the scramble.

As Donovan seized his own partner, who happened to be the *chic* little school teacher, Ella Sinclair, he saw that the odd man in this case was Steve Brandon, the local hardware merchant.

Donovan, dancing off with Miss Sinclair, took the conventional stance of two-stepping. That is, he held her right hand outstretched with his own left, while with his right arm he partially encircled the girl's body. Due to the fact that Donovan was six feet tall while the school teacher was but an inch over five, Donovan held his right palm pressed lightly high up on the back of the girl's white dance frock, touching her between the shoulder blades. As his right palm held this position, it left a round red stain on the fabric of her dress. Donovan had failed to observe the blemish of sticky red which for the last five minutes had soiled the cup of his own right palm.

He danced on, ignorant of this damning clue to his guilt. He saw Steve Brandon walk sheepishly off the floor.

"Better luck next time, Steve!" yelped Bob Miller from the orchestra platform.

Brandon grinned amiably, and then lounged over to join company with Deputy Sheriff Ed Kane and the stockman, Perry. Donovan happened to be guiding Miss Sinclair close to this group and he heard Brandon say:

"Ed, how about you and me and Buck sashayin' downstairs to lap up a round of pop? The treat's on me."

Kane and Perry cheerfully accepted. Donovan saw the trio go to the head of the stair well and disappear from view—which quite naturally frightened Donovan. He knew that in a moment more the crime down in the store would be exposed. His single grain of comfort was the knowledge that no one had seen his own exit or entry. He resolved to deny ever having left the floor.

At the moment Bob Miller was heard to call lustily from the platform—

"Circle all!"

Every man released his partner. The entire fifty couples formed again in the original hall wide circle.

"Grand right and left!" called Miller. "Gents to the right and ladies to the left."

The weaving started again. As he threaded in clockwise direction among ladies who in turn were threading in counter-clockwise direction, Donovan recalled that he had just committed a minor gaucherie. In his haste to join in the set, he had omitted the courtesy of holding his handkerchief in right hand, a convention designed to protect a lady's back from the perspiration of a man's hand.

SO DONOVAN, as he now weaved to the right, produced his handkerchief. Miller bawled out—

"Two-step all!"

And Donovan took the lady who chanced to be at hand. She was plump Mrs. Steve Brandon, wife of the hardware man who had just taken Kane and Perry down for a treat to soda pop.

The company two-stepped furiously, orchestral tempo getting faster all the while. Then Miller yelled—

"Circle all!"

Again the circle; again the weaving, ladies to the left and gentlemen to the right.

Again the two-step. The cycle was enacted four times. The dance ended, each lady on the floor having danced with four men, and each man having encircled the waist of four ladies.

Chattering, everybody moved back to the walls. Donovan was all a-sweat and wanted to be alone. So, having seated her, he excused himself from his fourth and last partner, withdrawing to a water cooler in the corner to get a drink. He had reached the cooler and was in the act of mopping the sweat from his brow with his handkerchief when he noticed a slight red stain on it.

Blood! Donovan's eyes started from his head.

The stain of guilt! He remembered that creeklet of crimson he had seen when stooping over the prone form of Garth. In a panic of apprehension Donovan looked at his hands. The left was stainless, but there was a red spot on his right. It was midway between the center of his palm and the base of his right thumb.

Donovan's back was to the room. Quickly he moistened his handkerchief at the faucet of the cooler. He then began a frantic scrubbing at the stain on his right palm. He erased it. There was an open window near. Donovan backed to it and threw the soiled handkerchief out.

He had no more than done so when Deputy Kane, Stockman Perry and Merchant Brandon entered the ballroom from the stair well vestibule. Donovan, watching anxiously, observed that their faces were portentously serious. Kane posted Perry at the stair well vestibule. Then Kane, with Brandon, crossed to the hallway vestibule. The two conversed a moment with Pegleg Starrett, who had never left his post at the ticket table all evening.

Donovan saw Kane suddenly face the ballroom and clap his hands.

Every one except Donovan looked toward Kane smilingly, naturally expecting an announcement of some novelty in the program. The deputy's speech, however, cast a damp, clammy chill over the entire company.

"Ladies and gents," announced Kane, "the dance is over. I mean for all except one man. I prophesy he'll dance at the end of a rope."

Goose flesh crept upward along the small of Donovan's back. The end of a rope! The phrase fairly stunned Donovan. Was Garth dead? Was it murder?

Yet, in a panic to be tightly pressed in a crowd, Donovan moved forward with the others. He heard a dozen excited queries being hurled at Kane. The entire assembly pressed into a compact group before the deputy, whose blue eyes were darting sternly from man to man of them all.

"Silence!" roared Kane.

The officer had both a commanding figure and a commanding voice. He dominated the group and, when silence reigned, he resumed:

"I want the truth from everybody. What men have gone down to Garth's store within the last hour?"

His audience gaped. A response finally came from Shorty Hoggarth, a chunky cowboy from over on the Chuquaak.

"Dobie Smith and me was down there a little after ten, Ed. Wasn't we, Dobie?"

"We was," acknowledged Dobie Smith. "Why? What's it all about, Ed?"

"Slim McBride and me was down there at ten minutes to eleven," spoke up Baldy James, the Trinchera barber. "I set Slim up to a round of pop."

"Yeh," verified Baldy James, "and while I was down there I paid Garth my monthly account, ten dollars and eighty cents. Why?"

"What was Garth doing?" challenged Kane, his blue eyes fixed steadily first on James and then on Slim McBride.

"He was bolting up for the night," informed McBride. "He remarked that Baldy's ten spot was just in time to get tied up with a shipment of money he was expressing to the county seat bank. While Baldy and me was lappin' our pop, we seen him sit down at a desk and begin tyin' up money in a pasteboard box. We kidded him about gettin' rich off the countryside, and then hurried on back upstairs. Baldy and me both had the next dance."

"At ten to eleven, huh?" quizzed Kane sharply. "It's now ten after. As you and Baldy came up, Slim, did you pass any one going down?"

McBride and James shook their heads in positive negative.

"Who went downstairs since ten to eleven?" thundered Kane. "Some one did. Some man in this room, because everything downstairs, doors and windows, is bolted from the inside. Pegleg, Perry, Brandon, Hollenbeck—watch the exits. Don't let anybody out. Whoever's guilty's due for a pinch here and now."

"Guilty of what, Ed?" shrieked a woman.

"Guilty of murdering Tom Garth and stealing twenty-one hundred and sixty dollars."

Three women screamed. Two others fainted. A score of men began talking at once and Kane had to roar for order.

"I think it was twenty-one hundred and sixty dollars." He finally made himself heard. "Slim and Baldy testified they saw him wrapping up an express shipment. That connects, because there is a freshly written letter on his desk, to the Picketwire National Bank of Trinidad, saying:

> "'Am expressing you under separate cover $2160 in currency. Please credit to my account.'

"So it shapes up this way," went on Kane. "Somebody from this fandango went down there at about 11:00, broke a pop bottle over Garth's head and took the money. He didn't leave by a downstairs door or window. So he must have come back up here. I shall now proceed to search every man in the—"

A shrill feminine voice interrupted Kane.

"Ella! What's that on the back of your dress?"

Donovan, all this while, was battling to keep guilt from showing on his face. He was in a blue funk; yet he kept closely pressed into the compact group of guests, his mind clutching at two straws of fact: first, that he was merely one of fifty equally suspected men; second, that there was no loot on his person.

At the shrill feminine cry he turned jerkily to his left. A group of ranch wives were congregated around Ella Sinclair. Miss Sinclair, in some perturbation, was trying without success to look over her own shoulder at the back of her dress.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Steve Brandon. "It's a spot of blood, Ella. And it wasn't there when I fixed the bow at your waist just before the circle dance."

"What's that? Spot of blood you say?" barked Deputy Kane, pressing his bulk through the crowd.

He went behind Miss Sinclair and looked closely at the crimson stain between the blades of trim shoulders.

A tense quiet gripped the crowd now. Donovan, fighting an urge to leap over Starrett's wooden leg and escape, stood his ground.

"MISS SINCLAIR," Kane was saying, "the crime down in the store was committed in the interval just before the circle dance. The guilty man returned and took part in the circle set. The blood of Garth was on his own right hand, and he left the print of it on your white dress. *Think!* What partners did you have in that set, Miss Sinclair?"

Donovan wondered whether any one

would notice that he was shaking like an aspen leaf. He bit his lips. He dug his fingers into his palms. Was he pale? Was his guilt writ on his face? He fought this funk desperately as he awaited the response from Ella Sinclair.

"I had four partners," the girl was telling Kane. "Let me think!"

Her black eyes blinked, with a degree of revulsion, as they swept the circle of men about her.

"Lem Smart was one," she finally testified, her glance resting upon a homely, double-jointed cowboy from the lower San Isidro. "And yes, Tony Cimino, I danced with him too. And Dan Fairman. And, let's see! Oh, yes, Frank Donovan; he was my first partner of the set. That's all."

Smart, Cimino and Fairman broke into vociferous protestations of innocence. Donovan thought best to join this chorus himself. Kane silenced them sharply, summoning Smart, Cimino, Fairman and Donovan before him.

The break was not bad, thought Donovan. For it happened that both Lem Smart and Tony Cimino had a reputation for rowdiness; Cimino, a chunky, curly haired ex-bartender from up at Aguilar, had the record of a shotgun killing to his account, although he had been acquitted. Smart was a rough type of gun toting cowhand. Fairman, however, was the railroad section foreman and happened to have an excellent record of citizenship.

"You four hold your hands up, palms forward," ordered Kane.

Smart, Cimino, Fairman and Donovan displayed their hands, which were devoid of any red stain.

"Which means," announced Kane, "that whichever of you is guilty has wiped the stain off."

"Whatta you insinuatin'?" complained Lem Smart peevishly. "You got the gall to accuse me of crackin' down on Tom Garth?"

"I haven't accused anybody," snapped the deputy. "I do know, however, that some man in this room killed Garth with a pop bottle, swiped his money and then came back up here to the dance. It happened just before the circle set. From the stain on Miss Sinclair's back, I'm convinced she danced with the killer. That narrows it to one of you four men. Everybody's got to be searched for the loot, but first of all we'll frisk you four, whether you like it or not. File into the men's cloak room, and be quick about it."

Sullenly, and amid a babble of comment from all sides, Smart, Cimino, Fairman and Donovan filed into the men's cloak room.

"Sam," instructed Kane, addressing Sam Hollenbeck, the local notary and a man of sterling repute, "I appoint you chairman of the frisking committee. Take Steve Brandon, Buck Perry and Pegleg Starrett. Everybody else stand pat."

Notary Hollenbeck, garbed as always in his somewhat threadbare black frock coat, moved solemnly into the cloak room, followed by his assistants.

Kane remained in charge of the main crowd. In turn he questioned them all. Every guest denied having made a descent to the store since ten minutes to eleven, when Garth had been seen alive by Slim McBride and Baldy James. Kane searched McBride and James. There was no loot on them. Nor was it credible that these reputable men had committed the crime in company.

Finally Hollenbeck, followed by his searching committee and the four principal suspects, filed out of the cloak room. Hollenbeck reported that no evidence had been uncovered.

In the end every man in the room was searched, without result.

Donovan, joining the group about Kane, was a little less uneasy now. He knew no one had seen him go downstairs at eleven and return at five after, because such testimony would otherwise have been heard from. Therefore it was a stalemate. He was merely one of four suspected men. But for that damnable red stain on the girl's back, he would be but one of fifty suspected men.

Finally Kane decreed that every one could go home except Donovan, Cimino, Fairman and Smart. The guests departed, the pall of tragedy having dulled their mood for frolic. Kane lingered for another hour to quiz, to bait, to trip by every trick he knew of cross examination, the four men who had danced with Ella Sinclair.

These four stood pat, affirming individually that they had not been downstairs at any time during the evening.

"Just the same, one of you did," retorted Kane. "Frisking you means nothing. Naturally the guilty man would have hid the package of bills. Coming back up here was his best bet on an alibi, too. Still, I can't pinch all four of you. All of you go home and stay there, in case I want you. I'll be after the man who runs, hotfoot, with a posse and a warrant."

Protesting innocence clamorously to the last, Cimino, Fairman, Smart and Donovan left the dance hall. Reaching the walk, Donovan turned to the left with the object of getting his saddle horse at the livery stable.

Doing so, he passed the creamery. Within him raged a mighty conflict among three opposing tugs of impulse. One was to step up there on the creamery platform, in the blackness of night, and get that package of money out of his own cream can. Not so much for the money itself as to submerge the evidence of murder. A second impulse was to get on his horse and ride far and fast, never stopping at all at his Blue Creek dairy ranch. His third and last impulse was the wisest, and in the end the one to which he adhered. That was to ride homeward like an innocent man. If Kane stumbled on the package in the cream can, Donovan could deny having placed it there. He could claim that some unknown thief had merely chosen the first convenient cache in sight.

But after all, thought Donovan, how small was the chance of any one's looking for money in a cream can. A thousand to one the can would not be searched. On Monday the creamery truck, on its weekly round over Route 1 to return empties and pick up full cans from shippers, would quite innocently deliver the loot to Donovan's door. Twenty-one hundred and sixty dollars! An insufficient price for the guilt of murder, admitted Donovan. But the price was paid. What now but to go home and await delivery of the blood bought goods?

THE DANCE was Friday night. Saturday passed, and Sunday. For all of those two days Donovan fretted alone at home on Blue Creek, the pressure of conscious guilt heavy on his head.

The suspense almost drove him insane. He strode about his place; in a constant funk, as every hour and every minute he fought against the impulse to retrieve, at whatever risk, his empty ten-gallon cream can. It nearly drove him mad to think that for all this sluggish week end it was sitting there on the creamery porch, exposed to every eye in town, containing the loot of the Garth murder and labeled with the very name and address of Donovan. Inside the loot! Outside the daubed lettering:

FRANK DONOVAN
ROUTE NO. 1

Yet he did not dare risk going in to retrieve it. He was afraid of it, deathly afraid of it. It was possible that Kane had already discovered the loot within it. Maybe Kane was keeping watch within the creamery, all this while, to see who might approach the can.

No, thought Donovan, the least risk lay in standing pat, in waiting, permitting the can to be delivered at his door. Only one day more. Tomorrow, Monday, it would come.

Monday morning he was up early, moving nervously about his chores. By eight o'clock he was through, with nothing to do but wait for the creamery's delivery truck.

It usually came by, Donovan knew, at about ten o'clock. Fretting, the man seated himself on his front porch to wait for it. The road of Route 1 ran right by his house. Donovan had a feeling that these two hours of impatient waiting were going to be the longest of his life.

At nine o'clock he decided to have his full can, this week's shipment, all ready, so as not to delay the truckman any longer than necessary. He went to his milk house. There he found a ten-gallon standard cream can, full of cream. He lugged it to the front porch.

He waited.

At 9:30 he decided he had better have a secure cache all prepared to receive the package of bills. He went around behind his house and dug a hole two feet deep with a post hole digger. He resolved to bury the money deep in the ground, and not touch it for months.

He returned to the porch. It was ten minutes of ten. His nervousness and his apprehensions increased. He felt of his right hip. His .38 gun was there, all right. Donovan generally carried a gun in his hip pocket, although he never used belt or holster. In this present crisis, it was particularly important to be armed. For if worst came to worst, and he was accused with potent proof, Donovan meant to shoot it out on the spot with his accuser.

So he assured himself that the gun was in his pocket and loaded. He seated himself squirmingly in a porch chair and looked at his watch.

It was five to ten. He waited.

He saw, at last, a black spot appear on a hill far up the road. Was it the creamery truck? No, it was too small. It was an open flivver.

The thing chugged closer, turning in at Donovan's gate. Donovan's taut nerves almost snapped as he recognized the driver. It was Deputy Sheriff Ed Kane.

The flivver's radiator, Donovan observed, was steaming. Kane stopped the car out at the horse trough and got out. Donovan saw him remove the radiator cap, looking about as if for some vessel with which to dip water. Finally the tall, athletic, pink cheeked deputy came striding toward the house, calling amiably:

"'Lo, Donovan. I got a hot box. What about a can to dip water with?"

"There's a grain bucket in the barn," responded Donovan, much relieved.

Yet at the same time he must speed Kane's departure, was his thought, before the arrival of the creamery's truck. And yet again, was his further reflection, he must appear natural. The natural thing for an innocent man to do would be to inquire about the Garth case.

"Did you ever find out who bumped Garth?" he asked.

Kane dropped into a porch chair beside Donovan, elevating his spurless boots to the most convenient rest, which in this case was the full ten-gallon can of cream. Languidly he began rolling a cigaret.

"Won't hurt to let that radiator cool off a little," he said. "And, no, Donovan, that Garth killing is still a mystery. I'm sorry to say, however, that the clue of the stain on Ella Sinclair's dress still points to either you, Smart, Cimino or Fairman. No offense meant, Donovan. You understand a clue's a clue, and got to be run down."

"Naturally," agreed Donovan, although his teeth were chattering so that he bit his tongue.

"Personally, I believe that the stain on the girl's dress will finally convict the murderer," went on Kane, puffing perfect rings of smoke across the porch. "The time of the murder is fixed at between 11:00 and 11:05. The circle dance was pulled off from 11:05 to 11:10. The killer was in it, because he couldn't have been any place else. Everything downstairs bolted from the inside. Mrs. Steve Brandon retied the bow at Ella's waist at eleven, and is positive there was no stain at that time. We borrowed the girl's dress, and called in an expert to compare the stain with Garth's blood. He reported—but hello! Who's that turning in at the gate?"

Donovan's eyes were bulging and his heart was pounding like a trip hammer. For the creamery truck was now turning in at the gate.

The truck, chauffered by a Mexican

named José Gonzalez, chugged up and stopped squarely at the front porch.

Donovan steeled himself against showing any especial interest in the exchange of loaded can for empty. He did not even arise from his chair.

He merely thumbed toward the full can, saying—

"There she is, José."

The driver had dismounted from his truck. Kane removed his boots from the top of the full cream can, whereupon the truckman hoisted it to his truck. He then began to scan the painted labels on various empties of his cargo, finally selecting Donovan's. This he deposited on the porch in the exact spot just vacated by the full can. Kane hoisted his feet to the top of the empty and resumed the blowing of smoke rings.

Donovan's nerves were in complete rout now. There was the loot squarely under the sheriff's boots. He itched to snatch away the can and carry it into the house. But that, he decided, would be too conspicuous. All he could do was sit there and squirm, praying that Kane would leave.

José Gonzalez mounted his truck and drove off.

Kane loitered in his chair, indolently blowing smoke rings, with his feet cocked on the empty can.

Donovan sat nearby, quaking with apprehension, his eyes riveted upon the ten-gallon container beneath the deputy's feet. It was his own can, right enough, the same one in which he had cached the loot. Donovan knew it by a certain dent, and by an oval area of rust, although José had set the can down with the labeled side away from Donovan.

Finally Kane's feet hit the porch with a pop and he said:

"I guess my radiator's cooled off now. I'll fill up at the horse trough, if you can stake me to a dipper, Donovan. Why, this here'll do fine."

Kane leaned over and reached for the dish shaped lid of the ten-gallon cream can. The lids of standard cream cans are, as every one knows, themselves quart measures. What Kane now reached for was as convenient a dipper as any one might wish. The very thing for dipping water from a trough.

The lid was stubborn, wedged as it was in the neck of the galvanized iron can.

Donovan leaped forward.

"I'll get it," he gasped, getting in between Kane and the can and wrenching at the lid himself.

The lid, the dish shaped quart measure, came off. Donovan, shielding the can with his body, handed the lid to Kane. Kane took it without a word and strode off toward the horse trough.

Relief left Donovan weak. It had been a close squeak, but it was over now. The gauntlet was run. Donovan saw Kane arrive at the horse trough and begin dipping water into the orifice of his flivver's radiator. His broad back was toward the house. It was Donovan's chance, and he took it with a snatch.

HE REACHED down into his cream can. He felt the package. It was there, safe enough, wedged within the metal cylinder. He yanked it out and recognized the wrapping. There was a half written address on it, in Garth's writing, to the Picketwire National Bank.

In a trice Donovan was rid of the thing. There was a board off the floor of his porch. In this hole Donovan dropped the package. Then he sat down. He groped for his pipe, crammed it full of tobacco with fingers which were as cold as ice.

He was safe at last. Let Kane return with the can lid. Let him even look into the can. A narrow squeak, but the peril was now passed and gone.

Kane, he saw, had completed his filling of the radiator and was returning to the porch. Reaching the porch, the tall deputy stopped at the ten-gallon cream can. He leaned over it, his eyes exploring the can's depths.

Suddenly he straightened, and his blue eyes narrowed as he looked upon Donovan.

"What did you do with the package, Donovan?"

Donovan stifled a shriek.

He arose, and his right hand began creeping back toward his hip. Had it come—the accusal? Was Kane baiting him?

"What package?" he gulped. His eyes were fixed on the butt of the .45 gun at Kane's belt.

"Not the package of money," responded Kane evenly. "I removed *that* myself. What did you do, just now, with a package of blank paper tied up in the same wrapping?"

Donovan shrieked his denial.

"I never saw any package."

"Yes you did, because it's gone from the can. You ditched it while I was down at the horse trough. I found the money, all right, where you stuck it Friday night. In fact, the crimson stain on Ella Sinclair's dress led me inevitably to your cream can. Donovan, you're pinched for the killing of Garth."

Donovan drew.

Kane drew.

It was an even break. Donovan's bullet was caliber .38 and Kane's a .45. The reports were in unison, but Donovan, in his funk, was away off form. His slug bit through a porch post three feet from Kane. Kane's bullet cut the bone of Donovan's right arm squarely in two.

Donovan screamed, dropped his gun, sagged to his knees, then to the palm of his left hand. He groveled before Kane.

Kane reached down and twisted the cream can through an arc of a hundred and eighty degrees. Its labeled side was now toward Donovan. Donovan saw the label, his own name and address, daubed brightly upon the metal exterior of the can.

FRANK DONOVAN
ROUTE NO. 1

And Donovan saw too that the daubed address was brighter than usual. The lettering was, in fact, a brilliant red. Easily explained, of course, because at about every tenth trip the creamery was accustomed to freshen the labels. Handling and rattling about in trucks were wont to dim the markings on the cans; the creamery, to safeguard against confusion and mis-deliveries, was in the habit ever so often of touching up the letterings which identified the cans.

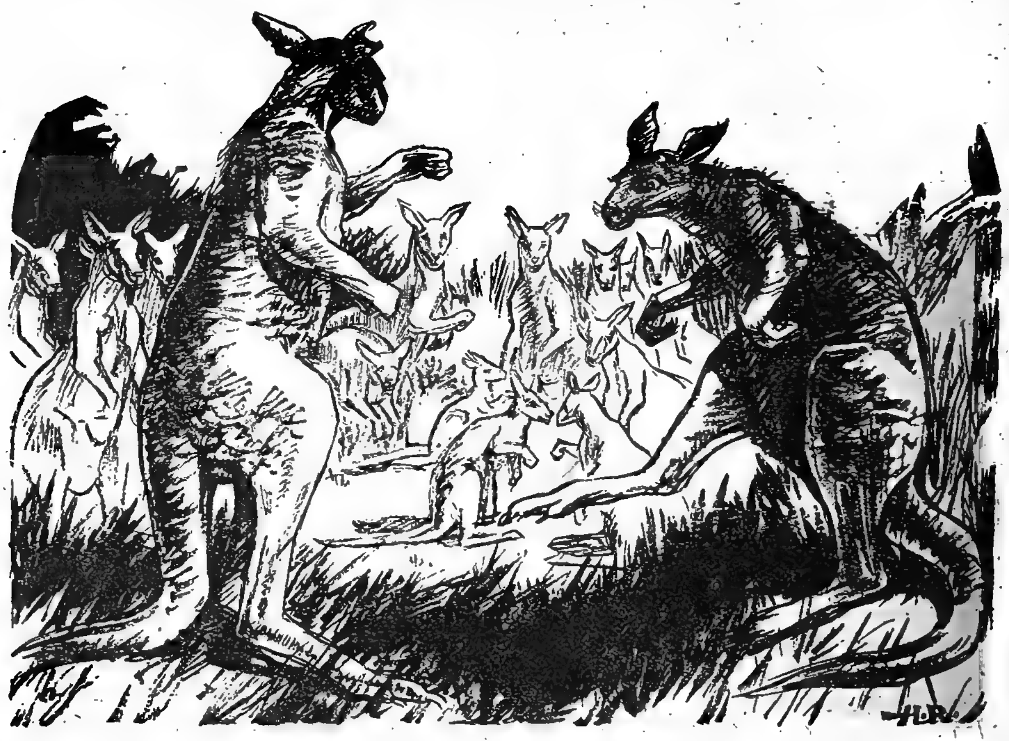
Such a relabeling had occurred on this last trip.

"He laughed at us, Donovan," Kane was saying.

"Who laughed at who?"

"The expert we called in to compare Garth's blood with the stain on the girl's dress. He gave us the horse laugh. He said the stain didn't compare with Garth's blood, or anybody's blood. In fact, it wasn't blood at all. I don't believe you even touched that creek of of blood dribbling from Garth's scalp. Do you get the idea? Not meaning to perpetrate any cheap pun, it was a catch-as-catch-can scramble; from the time you caught hold of a freshly red painted cream can to hide the money to the time you caught hold of Ella Sinclair's white dress. But those," finished Kane, looking down on the culprit through the smoke of his .45 gun, "were the two holds you'd orter have barred, Donovan."

A Story of the Australian Plain



A DUEL *of* GIANTS

By HENRY G. LAMOND

THE WIND whistled from the southeast, tearing over the limitless plains of western Queensland, Australia. Before it the grass waved and swept like the billows of the ocean, and round it all the endless horizon circled without a break. In the center of that plain was a group of trees, and away over to the right, a couple of miles distant, another scattered clump of timber broke the evenness of the plain.

From that far clump of trees a string of animals was making toward that shade in the middle of the plain. They were a mob of kangaroos, strung out in single file as they traveled. All told, there were about a dozen of them. In the lead were the half grown kangaroos known as flyers. These were of both sexes, and they sped lightly in the van. Steely blue they were in color, and with a grace and ease of movement unsurpassed among wild things. Next, mingled together, were does, some heavily loaded with young in their pouches and others with young on foot. The little fellows being carried by their mothers—joeys, they are all called—showed their heads and the tips of their hind toes out of the mouth of the pouch as they were carried, seeming to take an interest in all that passed. Behind these were some bachelor bucks not yet old enough to have a mob of their own and not of an age to make them offensive to their lord. And last of all, laboring heavily as he hopped, yet with the embodiment of strength showing in his every action, was the lord of the mob—the Old Man.

All old male kangaroos of Queensland are known as old men. On the western plains all are red, of the color of the fox. The does may be gray or blue-gray, the youngsters a deeper tint of the same color; but the old men are always red.

Lying beneath the shade of the trees for which the wandering mob was aiming were other kangaroos. These were a mob similar in numbers to those coming toward them, and the lord of that mob was a tawny old man who lay full stretched on the ground. Scattered about were the members of his mob. Some were lying at ease on the ground, flapping their long ears and throwing up an occasional spurt of dust with their hand-like front paws to ward off the flies. Others were squatting on their hocks, as it were, wiping their faces free of flies. A couple of young bachelor bucks were playing together, grunting as they smacked each other; and one flyer was propped on its stilts of legs and licking its forearms. For some unknown reason all kangaroos lick the inside of their forearms when agitated or disturbed.

The traveling mob came closer, the sound of their feet striking the ground vibrating through it to the resting 'roos. One doe struggled upright, thumped the ground once with her hind feet and leaned forward. Immediately her joey sprang to her, scrambled for a second, then fell head first into her open pouch. For a moment it struggled, arranging itself, and then its head and the tip of its hind claws appeared. Other does called their young to them; and all the mob sat up, alert.

The last to rise was the Old Man. He pulled himself together, rising in a series of jerks, each jerk showing his ponderous strength by his bulging muscles, and then he stood erect and surveyed the approaching mob.

When those figures rose out of the grass the traveling 'roos hesitated just a fraction of a stride in their progress. Then they came on and mingled with those lying beneath the shade of the trees. Noses were extended in friendship and smelt in peace. An occasional grunt told of an invitation given, and one or two of the bachelor bucks shaped up and pretended to spar, as boys will in fun when meeting.

The last to come to the camp was the Old Man. He came at the rear of his mob, and when about three hops from the trees he steadied slightly and let his tail hit the ground between his jumps. Then he propped suddenly, drew himself erect, swelled his chest and biceps, and gave his forearms a hasty dab or two with his tongue. He grunted a couple of times and surveyed the new mob to which he had come. Then, just as he was on the point of lying down and taking his ease, he met the eye of the other Old Man.

Both old men reared to their full heights and stared at each other. Both were of a size, standing fully seven feet high when erect; both were scarred warriors—with weals down their shoulders and tattered ears—and that both were gladiators who could, and would, fight was proved by the fact that each owned a mob. One, the newcomer, had one ear lopped, the result of a late combat; and the other had a white weal running from his right shoulder to his elbow, being a scar newly healed.

The does, bachelors and flyers mingled together and lay contentedly without fuss. A joey venturing too close to a doe would occasionally be cuffed and sent scurrying back to its mother; but apart from little scufflings for favored spots in the shade all was peace in the mixed camp.

The two old men continued to glare at each other. As their eyes met and held, the hair along the backs of their necks rose and stood stiffly erect; as they waited, both began to swell visibly. They reared in height, seeming to unwind themselves almost and stretch yet another link of altitude from their bodies. The muscles of their chests stood out boldly; their mighty biceps bulged in corded knots, and hastily, hardly daring to take their eyes from each other, they dabbed at and licked their forearms as the opportunity allowed.

Gradually the rest of the mob rose from their recumbent positions. They grouped themselves in a huge circle round the two old men. The does were peering anxiously, leaning forward on their front paws; the flyers were hopping in ecstatic excitement, unable to keep still; and the bachelor bucks, with their eyes protruding and quivering in their excitement, took front seats and never shifted their gazes from their lords and sires.

THE TWO old men were fully erect, standing on tripods formed by the end joints of their tails and the tiptoes of their hind claws. They were leaning back, chests thrust out, arms set in the approved stance; and verily, from their eyes fire flashed. They moved clumsily, shuffling in a circle, constantly facing each other. Deep down in their throats rumbling grunts sounded, and from each nostril their breaths hissed and whistled. Gradually they worked nearer, continually circling, and now those giants on stilts were almost within striking distance.

There was a blur, the deep thud of heavy bodies meeting in fierce impact; and a little spurt of dust rose and blew away on the wind.

The old men had closed!

Standing at their full height, their weight thrown back on their tails, straining and heaving, they met and held. For a mere shutter-click of time they clinched, their straining muscles and cracking tendons telling of the effort of the hug; and then one fellow—he of the lopped ear—reached forward and stabbed with his teeth, a pecking motion, at the other's shoulder. He sank in his living rapiers of teeth, tore and wrenched and snapped away. And as he drew back his head long strings of sinew and flesh trailed from the other's shoulder; and down that body streaming rivulets of scarlet trickled to the ground.

Scarry—he with the long scar down his arm—seemed unconscious of the pain that wound must cause him; oblivious of the agony those tearing teeth inflicted. His head was thrown back, his throbbing jugular exposed and the Adam's apple of his throat protruding. Suddenly he shuffled with his hind feet, took a closer grip with his straining arms, and he in his turn used his teeth.

The warriors fell apart and stood facing each other. Loppy's other ear was trimmed to match the one that was already cut in half; and from the wound little tricklets of blood ran down his head. The smart of the wound made him shake his head with pain, and round that shaking head an aura of red was sprayed by the action. The other fellow hastily licked his forearm and, in doing so, splashed his tongue across a flowing stream of blood from his shoulder. He threw up his head in disgust, snorted once in anger, and then in a flying cloud of dust both 'roos again rushed to the combat.

They met once more. Again their straining arms were wound each round the small of the other's back; again that frantic hug that strove to draw the enemy closer in a back breaking tension; and again those flashing fangs and hot breaths mingled and met in strong thrust and effective parry, in deadly stab and vicious counter.

The does were interested spectators. This, from their point of view, was a worthwhile spectacle. It mattered not to them that their lord was engaged in a life and death struggle. It was immaterial to them which of the old men would be the victor, and which a mangled corpse. Though they had lived under the protection and leadership of one of those combatants their only concern was with the victor. The vanquished may have been the sire of their joeys, and in the past on his guidance and wisdom had their lives depended. But they were his only by the right of might, and when that might was broken then would they gladly, with no show of regret, transfer their allegiance to his vanquisher. From their point of view it was merely an interesting sight. They may have known they were the spoils of the victor. If so, they were prepared to play the game and abide by the rules and etiquette of 'roodom. The victor had fought for them. The victor had won them. They were the victor's.

The flyers were as interested as the does. Perhaps they did not understand the meaning of this fight as fully as did the older females. But it was certainly a brilliant spectacle from their angle, and in all their young lives to date they had never seen anything half so exciting and enthralling. With little grunts of praise they cheered the fighters, and with little squeals of excitement they told their appreciation.

And the bachelor bucks—what of them? For them this was a lesson. Every guard they noted, every parry they watched, every counter, every thrust, every feint and attack was part of their education. When the old men swung in a straining wrestle the bachelors imitated them and shadow sparred with themselves. When the old men hopped back a stride or two the bachelors likewise retreated—from an invisible enemy. And when the old men advanced again the bachelors followed their every action and panted and strained in the intensity of their imaginary battles!

In a swirling vortex of rage the old men strained and heaved. They were close locked in each other's arms, seeking an opening for their teeth, shuffling for a chance to rip with the eviscerating talons of their deadly hind feet. The grass was beaten flat and chopped to chaff in their little arena; the ground was ploughed and churned to dust, and already from afar a black string was flying through the air and making for that clump of trees. They were crows. The smell of blood had come to them from a distance, and they, wise old birds that they were, would wait and cheer the victor while they attended the obsequies of the vanquished.

Loppy reared back slightly, balancing himself on the actual point of his tail and holding to his opponent with his arms. In that position he lifted both hind feet from the ground and with curious deliberation hesitated for a fraction of time. Then with awful power and deadly intent he drove full at the pit of his antagonist's stomach.

Those flying thunderbolts of death flashed through the air and—*woof!* They sounded like a wet drum as they drove home.

Scarry shook with the shock and bent double before that blow. Down the front of his belly a long strip of fur lifted and floated in the wind, and a new scar sprang vividly into being. He let his enemy go and staggered back, recovering himself.

Loppy reared himself yet higher, if such a thing were possible, and in the momentary truce called by that disengagement found time to dab his forearms a few licks.

BUT THE truce was only of sufficient time to enable Scarry to regain his balance. Like a piece of whalebone released, he sprang off his tail, and in a whirling rush of fury and rage incarnate he came again to the attack.

Both old men closed. Again Loppy tilted back to repeat his blow. This time Scarry nullified it—he bent in with Loppy as he went back, keeping his body hugged close to his opponent, not allowing sufficient space for that awful stroke to rise. Loppy wrestled and strained, striving to make room for his blow, and as he did so Scarry threw his body back, balanced on his tail, and then his flashing messages of death tore through the air and ripped down Loppy's body.

Both 'roos staggered back. They were torn and bleeding, gasping for air and weary. But though their great bodies heaved and bellowed for air, and though their aching muscles were strained and drooping in agony, not one semblance of surrender would either give. Either would fight so long as he could stand; either would die before acknowledging defeat; and either would be a worthy lord for the combined mobs, or else but carrion and a feast for the crows.

Again they closed. Now they rocked as they stood, and though their anger was not one whit abated, in reality they had to lean one against the other for support. But their eyes still flashed fire, and their rapiers of stabbing teeth still sought an opening in which they could wrench and tear. Though the tremendous buffet of their hind claws was now reduced to but a shoving blow, each brought that tearing talon to use when possible, and after each blow they staggered back to regain their poise.

One inquisitive joey strayed near the mêlée. At the time, one of the warriors was swinging the other in an effort to throw him, and as those staggering legs came by, the joey clutched at them and held. Disengaging on the instant, and striking with the speed of flicking light, the warrior smashed with his hand in a sweeping blow. That buffet took the joey at the nape of the neck, and with scarcely more than a quiver it lay still in death, its neck dislocated.

The doe, the mother of the joey, crept forward on her hands and feet. She nosed that twitching body which was her young, and tenderly she drew it to her. She picked it up in her arms, nursing it as a woman might a child, and then when the realization of its death came to her she turned and fled from the scene in terror.

Two bachelor bucks in their excitement had bumped into each other while following the fight. For a few seconds there was a whirling skirmish among the spectators as those bachelors closed and fought. But theirs was only the equivalent of a hair pulling match. They clawed and scratched, bit and grunted, and when one raised his hind foot and took the other in the pit of the stomach that fight was ended ingloriously and they returned to their seats to view the real fray.

Loppy had Scarry in his arms, hugging him closer in a back breaking strain. As Scarry bent back, his antagonist leaned over him, drawing yet closer, and then he pecked with savage teeth at that exposed and throbbing jugular. Once he drove and drew away. Again he stabbed and tore fur, skin and flesh. And the third time as he came away a mighty spurt of blood followed him and Scarry reeled and staggered as Loppy let him go.

The fight was won. As Scarry fell back Loppy leaped on him in a paroxysm of rage. He stabbed and tore and buffeted. He strained and wrenched and stood back to deliver another crushing blow from his tearing hind claw. And as that blow landed Scarry fell in a sobbing heap, gurgling and gasping, on the ground.

As quick as the snap of an electric switch the bachelor bucks broke ranks. In a sweeping wave they bore down on the defeated warrior. As he struggled to rise they swamped him with the avalanche of their bodies, and on the ground they pommeled and stamped on the Old Man who was sire and lord of at least half of them. One buck picked the head from the ground and in an orgy of rage he sank in his teeth. He shook and worried it as a dog does a rat, and then he sprang away and smashed it with his hind claws as he leaped.

The does were methodically attending to their toilets, licking themselves and putting their fur in order. Some were gathering their joeys, and others had already composed themselves for their rest which had been disturbed. For them the spectacle was ended. They had a new lord and master, and when he chose to claim them they were ready.

Some of the flyers were still watching, interested. Others, to whom the excitement had not yet died, were starting in little spurts and racing round the trees. One nervous youngster raced out on the plain for a hundred yards or more, stopped suddenly, took fright at its own shadow, and came pell-mell back to the shelter as though pursued by the imps of the nether regions. There it lay down, threw dust over itself, and composed itself to rest.

Loppy, the victor, was standing out clear of the mob. For a minute or more he retained his statuesque pose. Then his muscles slowly relaxed and he seemed to shrink into himself. Hastily he commenced to lick his forearms, and then he bent double and busied himself on his groins. From his mouth long strings of saliva hung as he licked and cleansed himself, and from his lips red froth and clots of blood gathered and fell.

On the trees the crows were cawing their delight. Loppy raised his head and looked at them, and perhaps through his brain the thought flashed that he, too, one day would lie under a tree gasping his life out, while those same black fiends above would jeer at him and await the stilling of his quivering body to descend to make a feast of what had once been a lord of a mob and victor of many combats.

The TALKING DRUMS

By T. SAMSON MILLER

FROM the conical huts of the village that straddles the trail, just ahead of our night camp, there sounds a talking drum. One knows it is a talking drum because the beats have no rhythm. The blacks are in gossip with the next village. Or more likely they are sending word along about the white men on the trail. They tell the number of our carriers, our business, and whether we are "open palms" — unarmed and friendly — or "closed fists".

If we have had bad palaver, say over food supplies for the carriers, or trouble with a chief who held us up for *dash*—present—or if we are suspected of coming to spy out the country, the drums—the telegraph of Africa—will drum it all ahead of us. So we have to go carefully, avoiding trouble and misconceptions.

On the Niger River they use a special drum talk for inter-tribal communication. There is, in fact, a drum language, distinctly apart from the dialects. This language is a guarded secret, known only to the initiated. To the white man, a stranger in a land full of suspicion and trickery, this unknown drum talk is sinister—like ugly whispering.

If the drum is talking to a village of the same tribe the drummer will talk in the tribe's dialect. The Yoruba people claim that their language is so musical that it can be translated straight on the drum. As the Yoruban language consists mostly of vowel sounds the claim is reasonable. A nomadic troubadour of Yorubaland once showed me the how of it. His finger tips tapped out long and short vowels. It was quite easy to detect *a, aye, ah; i, aie; o, oh;* short and long ee and u, and then a doubling of the vowels, as *aie-oh, aie-ee.* On the other hand, the special drum talk is more like a Morse code, with long and short sounds and different spacing of the beats.

Just how far drum talk can be heard is a matter of dispute. Drum beats have an unusual carrying quality. The single beat of the big drum of a marching band is heard far beyond the range of the blaring brass instruments. I have noted that the African drummers hold their drums close to the ground when talking; or if the village is on the Niger River and the village talked with is also on the river, the drummer will hold his instrument close to the water. Water carries sound.

A story of the valorous men who challenge the high and lonely domain of the unscaled mountain heights

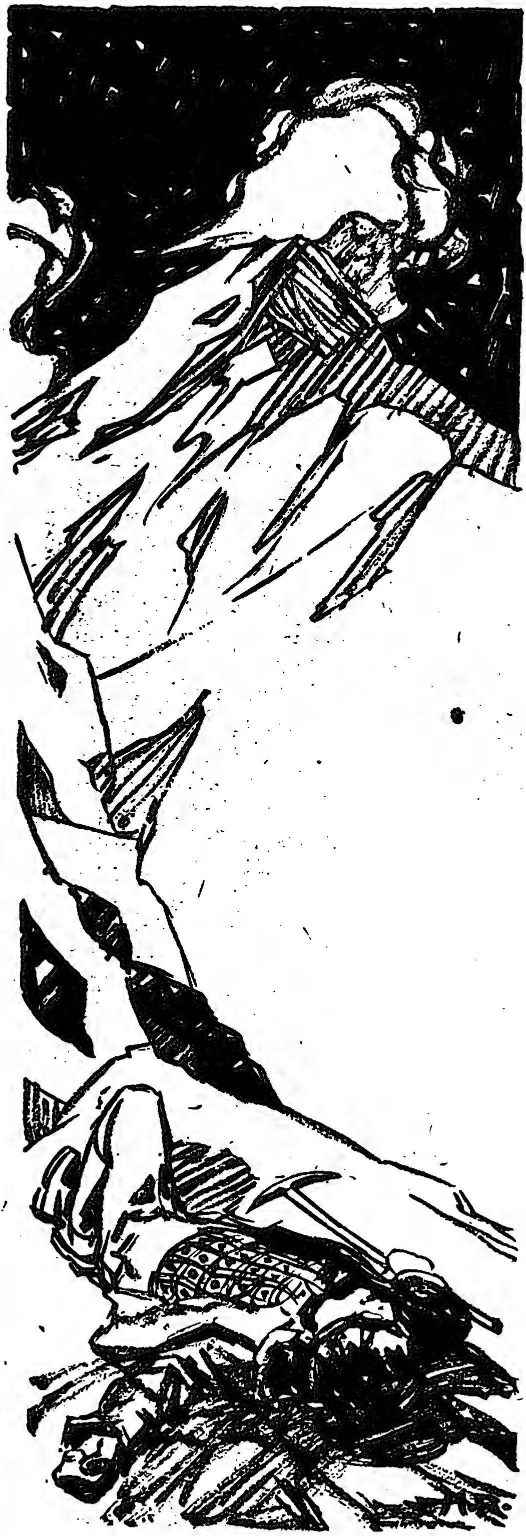
MEN *to* MATCH

By ROBERT CARSE

Bring me men to match my mountains.
—VERDI

HERE were the color and movement of the somehow unholy fantasy of the devil dance; the mumble and chuckle of skull drums, of twelve-foot trumpets, horsehair strung violins. Things such as Fencham had never seen or heard before. From his brain he could not rid the sound of the disturbing, clasping music; it was like the surf of a night sea . . . But that strange hypnosis had not controlled his eyes. He lifted them now, up and beyond the dark gleaming faces of the Bhotias lining the monastery wall, to the sheer and cold immensity of the mountain.

It was the mountain which had brought him here from England. It was the mountain which he did not understand, by which he was at once made afraid and fascinated. The mountain—Chagu La—Queen and Keeper of the Winds, Mother of the Monsoon. Which the little group of men with him had come to assault, to conquer; which he had been sent to paint.



There it was. Beautiful. Terrible. Titanic. For days, ever since they had left Darjeeling, he had dreamed of it, heard of it incessantly. For days, as they had ridden through the Chumbi, sweet stinking yaks and mules behind them in a brown, bobbing line, he had seen it, faint, chimerical, among and above the mountains ahead.

Now it was clear, alone, commanding. Chagu La, Mother of the Monsoon. Ruddy brown; fainter russet. Then deep jade; then impossible topaz; wine rich purple, ringed and surmounted with the glimmering white fire of the snow which was the eternal barrier of the men who sought to conquer it.

Fencham was an artist. Beauty—such as that of the mountain—hurt him, held him, as a woman might, but with a thrall greater than all women. The thing oppressed and disturbed him now; he looked away from it, but knowing that soon his eyes would go back to it, as a man at night will look back at his fire.

The twelve-foot trumpets, the skull drums, the odd shaped violins had dropped to the lowest fifth of the pentatonic scale now; muttered, boomed and beat there—then sprang, deafening and piercing, upward. On the packed earth of the courtyard floor the dancers were spinning, swooping, their varicolored robes swirling about them in small hurricanes of frantic movement. It was beyond human endurance; for two days and two nights they had been eternally at it. This was the end. Trumpets, drums, violins were done. Ears ached in that short minute until the crowds of priests and peasants uttered up their tremendous yelling, then were slowly silent.

"We'll go now," whispered the man at Fencham's side. "But I guess we must go over and bid goodby to the jolly *lama* with the colonel."

Fencham nodded, got up also, holding close his sketches, his boxes of paints, of crayons. About him other men of the expedition were getting to their feet—the climbers themselves, their frightened, still entranced servants, Nepalese Gurkhas, Sherpas from the lower valleys of the Sikkim. In a rough sort of column, silently, weird medley of hats in their hands, the Englishmen moved toward the motionless figure of the *lama*, Rachim-Lay, Possessor of Many Countenances, head of the big Buddhist monastery wherein they stood.

The *lama* sat now on a small, backless chair under the projection of the courtyard balcony. Against the garish brightness of the religious pictures decorating the wall he was a large and commanding figure. His right arm, bare and powerful, stretched to his right knee, broad thumb just touching the holy embroidery adorning the front of his somber robe. For a moment his coppery, broad cheeked face was without expression; then a wholly charming smile of greeting and benediction possessed it.

The little one eyed colonel, leader of the expedition, stopped directly before him, the young halfbreed Nepalese interpreter at his left. The colonel spoke in his flat English voice, using the Sikkim dialect.

"Tell him we thank him very much; beg his benediction and his exorcisim of the demons of the high places. We are going now to the mountain, to the Queen and Keeper of the Winds. We shall kill no living thing in the valley. We shall treat his men well. We shall pay them and feed them, keep them warm in the snow and wind. They shall be as us and of us. Speak."

The halfbreed interpreter swallowed, cleared his throat, spoke, frightened eyes on the upturned, embroidered toes of the *lama's* slippers. The *lama* still smiled, still rested, statue-like. A tall young priest at his side answered in sing-song Sherpa. In a mumbling voice the Nepalese translated:

"It is good. It is very good. He has given unto us—men, beasts and spirits—his blessing. It shall be as it shall be; as *Karma* has written."

For a second or so the little colonel let his one eye rest shrewdly on the face of his interpreter.

"And the monsoon?"

"He has communed with the Mother of the Monsoon. He has propitiated it for the strangers who have brought him gifts in all humbleness. It will not come for several weeks."

A small whistling sound which was the exhalation of the breathing of the men behind him came to the colonel's ears. His own voice was a bit vibrant as he asked—

"He has no other message?"

"Yes, sahib, another message: The Possessor of Many Countenances reminds the sahib that men who are on the mountain in the same place and the same hour as men who died before, shall also die."

"Ah!" The colonel's voice was very soft. "That is all?"

"That is all, sahib."

Then, giving implicit cue to companions and servants behind him, the colonel bowed, humbly but jerkily, with the stiffness of an essential unbeliever and an English officer. Head bowed, Fencham looked up with half closed eyes. Beneath his peaked leather cap the *lama's* face was as grave, as peaceful again as that of an ageless idol. Still facing the Possessor of Many Countenances, the colonel backed away, his men moving awkwardly behind him. Fencham, his nerves already tautened by the long and terrific sensory strain of the devil dance in the courtyard, was one of the first to make a break for the gate.

Young Wickerly came charging at his heels, to smile at him companionably.

"Well, that's over! The cards are completely stacked with us now; the Foreign Office satisfied; these local beggars thoroughly scared and the ruddy monsoon given direct sailing orders for two weeks to come. A neat piece of work, I calls it!"

"Quite so," nodded the slightly built Fencham. "Quite right. You'll excuse me now? I want to catch a couple of sketches of this crowd before the light goes."

The tall, handsome boy looked at him closely, his face grave.

"Always the artist, hey, Fencham?"

Fencham ignored the implied irony of the question, shook his head smilingly.

"It's my business."

He nodded jerkily in farewell, then turned away through the odorous, chattering crowds of peasants, already blowing on his cold fingers to warm and limber them.

Blue, broad shadows were spreading out from the dirty white of the monastery walls when he at last closed his paint boxes, lighted his pipe and swung toward the little tent colony of the expedition. Already the yak and mule convoy stretched in a dun stream down the bleak rubble of the valley and of the half hundred porters only his own *sais* stood beside the smoldering heaps of camp rubbish, his hands on the bridle of Fencham's chunky mule.

Fencham grunted harshly as he handed the man his boxes, pulled on his fleece lined gloves and mounted.

"The colonel sahib left a message?" he asked in his broken Sherpa.

The *sais*, striding powerfully along at the mule's shoulder, inclined his shaven poll.

"Yes, sahib. He sought me out; told me that no man would eat tonight at the new camp unless he worked first. He said there is much work and very little time."

Fencham cursed in English and kicked the patient mule with his boot heels. The *sais*, an understanding man, smiled and increased his pace.

NIGHT came with the swiftness of a falling sword. But the Gurkha bodyservants already had fires of *shing* burning palely and tents were rising white and reassuring in the darkness. Past the picket line where the drovers fed and watered mules and yaks, Fencham found the colonel.

"You wanted me, sir?"

"Ah?" The hard faced little man looked up at him blandly. "No—no! We've quite well taken care of things now."

"Thank you very much, sir," said Fencham, and rode away toward his own tent. Beside him he could hear the low, satisfied chuckle of the *sais*.

His anger was still with him until he entered the warmth of the mess tent an hour later. No man, he thought as he seated himself at his own corner of the canvas covered table, could long withstand the nervous, feverish gaiety of this gathering. These men were different from him in three essential things: all of them, from the colonel down, were landed gentlemen of independent income; were, or had been, soldiers; were mountain climbers when not soldiers. He was none of these things in their eyes, or in his own. He was an artist, a hack artist working for an illustrated London paper, reporting with sketches and quick water colors the movements of this latest expedition to conquer the mountain which the scientists had just declared to be the fourth highest in the world—but as dangerous in ascent as the unconquered mountain of mountains, Everest. Only one thing, he mused, that he had in common with these men, was his fascination and wonder in the face of the Mother of the Monsoon, Queen and Keeper of the Winds . . .

"Ah, Fencham!"

It was the colonel. Fencham looked up, his face and eyes calm.

"You got your sketches of the local beggars?"

"Yes. They're in the tent. I'll show you them before my *sais* packs them off tomorrow."

"Good! Good! Today—today's my birthday. Tonight's the real beginning of things for us. We're having a little rum—a little rum to celebrate. You'd like a little rum, Fencham?"

"Thank you, yes."

They passed the bottle from man to man until it reached him. He filled his cup part full.

"*Salute*, and best wishes, sir!"

"Thank you! Thank you!"

They all smiled at him and he felt suddenly quite warm inside. Just as he was leaving, the colonel spoke again:

"Ah, Fencham, would your rag use a picture of 'An Old One Eyed Mountain Climber'? Or would it be better if you gave me two?"

"Seeing that the war got the other, yes, sir."

They all grinned and laughed at that and passed him the bottle again before he left.

When light streaked the dawn sky with white gold the Gurkhas rose up, singing softly, merrily, to renew the cooking fires of yak dung. Pots rattled. Sleepy Sherpas of the convoy stumbled about the picket line, feeding and watering yaks and mules. There was the smell of hot soup, gold-brown bacon in the clear, sharp air.

Fencham, smoking his before breakfast cigaret in the door of his little silk tent, watched with eager eyes. Down the paling sky spread an alabaster corridor of light. The sun struck slowly at the valley mists. It was daylight. Fencham looked up, up at the mountain. His fingers quivered; he shook his head as if consciously denying the beauty of the Queen and Keeper of the Winds.

The *sais* stood on one foot, then the other for awhile, holding in his corded hand the cooling pannikin of food. At last:

"Sahib, the food grows cold and the colors thou makest grow larger, larger. And those unshaven *tingli* ones will steal the grain for my mule unless—"

Fencham thrust his brush through the thumb hole of his palette and smiled gently.

"Put the food down; go and get thine own, then go and fight stoutly with the *tingli* ones for the grain for thy mule."

"But you will eat, sahib?"

"Yes, I will eat when this is done. Set it down."

"*Aie!*" muttered the *sais* half under his breath. "It is always the mountain—the mountain!"

"Yes," answered Fencham, looking up and far off again, "it is the mountain."

IT WAS done when the *sais* came back leading his Chumbi mule, but the bacon was dark and congealed in its tin, the soup like frozen lard. The *sais* shook his head and muttered; this little man would probably starve to death out of absentmindedness while he was gone. But Fencham, grinning and happy now, overpaid him, bustled him on to the mule and sent him off at a jerking trot down the valley, the sheaf of sketches and canvases wrapped in oilcloth and securely lashed to his back.

When he was out of sight Fencham folded up his light easel, cleaned brushes and palette, turned and stored the things in his tent. Then again he stood in the door of it, watching curiously. In front of the colonel's broad flapped tent stood four men, talking, laughing gayly. In their gloved hands they held blue lensed snow goggles, ice axes, coils of light Manila line.

Envy and bitterness were within Fencham for a minute. Those were the men of the reconnaissance party; today they would go more than halfway up his mountain. They . . . And he would stay here to earn his pay, sketch the wild haired Chumbi muleteers, the itinerant holy men and hapless wanderers who always collected about the scraps of the cooking fires, while that gay, powerful, confident four strove in assault of Chagu La. Fencham knew one anodyne; he went into the tent again and when he returned drawing board and crayons were in his hands.

Darkness and a cold, keen wind were in the valley at the foot of the glacier when the four came back that night. Young Wickerly and another lad carried the remaining two. Fencham stood mutely watching them as the smart little Gurkhas sprang forward and helped aid them in.

One man moaned unknowingly with the pain of a broken leg; the other's face was the color of old paper, his mouth slackly open in the horrible nausea of the mountain sickness. First toll of Chagu

La—a loose boulder, slippery ice or powdery, shifting snow, the pressure and pain of the high places. Fencham shook his head; perhaps it was not for him after all.

At dawn the little colonel stumped along the stolid line of veteran porters as if they were a platoon on inspection. Wickerly, despite his immense exertions of the day before, stood at the head of them, holding his ice ax as he would a cane. The colonel shook hands with Wickerly, snapped a final order at the gray headed old *sirdar* bossing the train of porters. The line stepped off, the Sherpas uncomplaining beneath their immense loads of food, tents, oxygen tanks and camp equipment. Fencham, standing a bit aside as usual, watched them go, his lips a little dry. What had happened yesterday had been accepted immediately as challenge. These men went to establish the first mountain camp, three thousand feet above.

That week, in solid stream, other strong, agile men went up the bleak brown rubble of that slope, turned, black and almost infinitesimal dots, about the frowning, jagged white shoulder of the first *serac,* and were gone from sight, swallowed up by the mountain. In driblets, wearily limping, some of them came back, a day, two days later.

In the mess at night, sitting about the small warmth and light of the candles, they told their stories. Camp 1 was established beyond the South Col; Camp 2 on a sheltered ridge of rock four thousand feet above that. Wickerly and young Mank were even now holed in the snow at the foot of the West Peak, waiting to establish 4 and 5. Then the final assault. The attack, desperate, quick, rapier-like, on the summit.

But the little colonel cursed and shook his head. Haze was in the valley in the daytime now. That meant the coming of the monsoon, and the inevitable end of this year's attack on the mountain. Ten days, two weeks at best, were left. And there were no men; eight already had been sent back to the monastery of the Possessor of Many Countenances for recuperation, and beyond, to Sikkim and to India.

FENCHAM sat alone in his corner, disturbed, unhappy, like a man troubled and held closely by a fantastic and gruesome dream. In a dozen different moods, in a dozen different lights, at dawn, at noon, at swift sundown, he had painted his mountain—as he had never painted before. There was new fire in his work, a new, harsh, brilliant touch, warmed into being by the mountain. And now at night he could not sleep; always before his eyes were dreams of the white burning fire of the noon sun on the magnificent reaches above, the glorious, tumultuous panorama of the titan range stretching like some immense and powerful beast in uneasy sleep from there to India.

And up there on those dazzling, dangerous slopes they needed men. White men to keep the service of supply going, to maintain the life blood flow of food and fresh oxygen tanks to the men at the uppermost camps, who were even now resting themselves for that last terrific assault. There were no more men at the base camp who could go; no men whose hearts and lungs could stand the icy winds, the low pressures of those altitudes over twenty thousand feet. And he was young and healthy, single, held down by nothing but his flimsy contract with the paper which had sent him here because no other man would take an assignment which would keep him from England and in this wilderness for almost a year.

Fencham's fingers trembled on the spotted canvas of the table edge. There was a warm, tingling sensation about his throat, about his eyes. His lips were dry, his eyes bright. He almost spoke. Death was up there, he thought. Death ever present for even the strongest and most experienced men. While he had done little more than climb the upland moors of the Scottish Highlands.

Then the question came to him and he asked it of himself. Was he a coward, a man afraid of death? These drawn faced men at the other end of the table kept aside from him in almost all things because he had not been a soldier, an officer with a fighting unit during the war, such as they had been; because he had been, instead, a staff artist sent out by the War Office to sketch pretty W.A.A.C's, fat major generals, dead horses and smashed trucks behind the lines. Always his nascent talent had kept him apart, in a place of dependence, of partial inaction. And not until now, after fifteen years of slaving, of cheap hacking, had that talent developed into its present fiery brilliance.

He closed his eyes for a moment, put his hands over his ears to shut out the sounds of their low voices at the other end of the table. Rapidly, he visualized that little stream of broken and staring men who had come down from the terrible grasp of the Queen and Keeper of the Winds. Strong men, stronger than he, men who had given wantonly of their fine strength and youth so that a mountain might be conquered.

A shudder passed slowly over him. Now—now that he had at last come into the full brilliance of his talent, must he go up there, to lose fingers, a hand, by frost bite as some of those others had? He was a fool, a madly possessed fool! He got up and went quickly out of the tent.

He opened his eyes fully and looked up—at his mountain. Cloud scud was blue; it was black along the massive reaches of the lower slopes. The wind stormed and called shrilly, ballooning the tent flaps, scattering even there a fine powder of snow. Like a silver lance, a moon shaft struck through. Another—another— Pushed by the impatient hands of the wind, the clouds rolled back. The moon was high and clear on the ebony, star shot slopes of the sky.

In bold and high relief it threw the ultimate peaks of the mountain, limning them, setting its poignant glamour upon the Titan's shoulders of the summit, flinging the valleys and cols into utter blackness, ridging, firing and accentuating new crests with its light. For only a moment did it last. Thick and swift vapor flung across in a majestic curtain until the last silver lance retreated from the valley and was gone.

It must have been several minutes that Fencham stood within the door flaps of the mess tent before he spoke.

"Colonel!"

"Yes?" Across the vague yellow barrier of the candle flame the little one eyed man looked at him. "Fencham? What—"

Fencham swallowed, spoke without hesitation, calmly.

"I would like to go up the mountain; assist those that are there."

Little knots of muscles appeared at the corners of his jaw, his eyes narrowed and his hands were rigid and hot. If, he told himself, any of those at the other end of the table as much as smiled at him now—

"My dear fellow!" managed the colonel. "My dear fellow! You know men died up there last year? That it is as dangerous as the big one—Everest, and just as dangerous this year as Everest was when we lost six men? You—well—" His one eye swept over Fencham's face, caught at and steadied on Fencham's eyes. The colonel had commanded men from Karachi to Cambrai for thirty years; he knew his man now. "We need men up there—very badly. You look like a good one. But—but—" again the colonel's nervous manner of speech settled upon him—"you are sure this is not a thing of the moment, so to speak?"

"No."

"Your paper?"

"I'm leaving the paper when I get back anyhow. I'm going free lance."

"Ah, I see. You're sure, then?"

"I am; yes."

"Your heart and lungs? Your general physical condition?"

"Fine. The doctor, there, examined them when we left Darjeeling, and then again yesterday."

The colonel smiled; a dry but pleasant smile.

"You're quite decided on it, what?"

"Yes."

"But you've done no mountain climbing?"

Fencham flushed slightly.

"No, not as you men consider it; but I've done a little for fun—a few of the smaller peaks in the Jungfrau country, some of the bigger ones in the Canadian Rockies when the paper sent me out there with the prince last spring."

The colonel smiled warmly, broadly, as he would at a much younger brother.

"You're our man, then! If you're going up with them to the last camps, you'll have to get some intensive training first. Surabat Taya, the *naik*, is the man for you; mountain climbing is like breathing for them down in the Nepal. He's going up to Camp 2 tomorrow with a load of stuff. Back down tomorrow night; up to 3 the next day. Two weeks of that will either make you competent enough to go up and join Wickerly and Mank, or you will not go at all, for the monsoon will be here at any hour then. Now, you must get your sleep. Good night."

FENCHAM did not know how to salute; he nodded and went out into the night, a queer rushing and singing sound in his ears, tiny beads of perspiration on his forehead and the backs of his hands. Alone in his little tent, far down in the thick folds of his sleeping bag, he repeated to himself that he must sleep—must sleep. But sleep did not come to him until several hours later. In his brain was the vision, burning and distinct, of the mountain in the moonlight—his mountain.

In the morning he went, dressed for the first time in windproof silk, thick layers of wool, a solar topee upon his head, felt sided, wooden soled mountain boots upon his feet. The colonel and the others bade him goodby with seeming indifference, but there was a warm glow in their eyes and in their hand grasps as at last, getting his final instructions, he fell in beside the stocky Gurkha *naik*, Surabat Taya, at the head of the line of porters, then turned toward the mountain.

That day, and in those eleven days that followed, he learned many things about his mountain. First, that although he was not the ideal type of Anglo-Saxon mountain climber—tall and rangy—he was compact, wiry, his heart and lungs excellent. Surabat Taya, the Gurkha *naik*, taught him the rest, building strongly up from his own foundation gained in the Alps and the Canadian Rockies. He learned to tell good snow from wind and sun weakened drifts, to protect himself from sun glare and frost bite, to traverse, make a *descente abseil*, use ice ax, crampons and Alpine body rope. But he got no higher than the third camp, for as yet his task was only that of a pupil, as a companion to the parties of Chumbi porters busy transporting food and oxygen to the highest camps.

At night, alone, he dreamed of those farther up—young Wickerly and Mank, waiting for the day which would spell for them victory—or defeat and possible death. He envied them, almost hated them, sometimes, for his love and fascination for the mountain came very close to being madness. But, he told himself, smiling dourly in the darkness, he was proving himself—proving himself and from acolyte would soon step triumphantly into the hard, high command of master.

It was the colonel himself who came into his tent in the base camp to awaken him an hour before dawn.

"You're going up, Fencham," said the colonel abruptly. "You and Surabat Taya, with the last reserve oxygen. It's time—it's time. The monsoon—it's coming now. You'll hurry, Fencham?"

There was a slight note of hysteria in the artist's voice as he answered:

"Immediately, sir! At once!"

The colonel left him then and he was again alone, singing, laughing, mumbling joyously to himself as he dragged on his clothing, strapped on the great mountain boots, looped his goggles about his solar topee. But he was gravely silent ten minutes later when he breakfasted in the mess tent and listened to his instructions from the colonel. He and the *naik* were to set out at once for Camp 5, where Mank and Wickerly were waiting. He was to tell the pair to make their assault on the following morning, for, cold weather, icy winds or no, the monsoon was coming. He and the *naik* were to go up with the two, assist them in all but the final dash for the summit, aid them in carrying spare oxygen, digging traverses, building rock cairns to mark the return trail were they forced to come back at night or in a snow gale. That was all; the rest were supplications to hurry.

The colonel and the others said no word as they shook hands with him; everything had been said. Jerkily, Fencham gave them a rough salute with his ice ax, then he and the Gurkha paced off, shoulder to shoulder, powerfully, knowing one another from their weeks of practise together. The familiar trail about the corner of the *serac* wound fascinatingly now before him and when he thought to look back, the base camp was obscured from view.

The day was dark, without strong sun. Strangely, no wind blew, and when he remarked on it as they laboriously surmounted the shale of the south col, the *naik* cursed grumblingly beneath his breath and Fencham made him repeat his words. The monsoon—had the sahib not heard the colonel—it was coming. Soon? Right now, sahib! How did Surabat Taya know? *Aie.* Surabat Taya was a mountain man, had been here last year on the mountain, and before that on Everest, mountain of mountains. And now the feel of the thing, the knowledge of its coming, was like heavy and cold metal in his veins.

It was so. Before noon, with a screaming sound like that of a thousand wounded horses, it came out of the north. It lashed the *seracs*, spun white specters up from the snow banks, tore and pummeled at them as they climbed hand hold to hand hold along the traverse which would take them to the second camp.

No one was there when they pounded into the place, goggles white with frost, faces stiff and numb with the first signs of frost bite. In the cook tent Fencham found a note, secured to the top of the little Primus stove with a spaghetti can: a messenger had come that morning down from above to call them with the last tanks of oxygen to the fourth camp; any one coming from below would do well to join them there.

Wickerly and Mank, then, had been seized by the same premonition that had held the colonel.

THE *naik* nodded when Fencham translated it to him. Sahib Wickerly also knew, so? *Aie*, there was a mountain man for you! Then the square faced little fellow was quiet, squatting over the Primus, heating soup, canned meat, rough native *tzampa* which he made into small, brown cakes.

Shortly after they had eaten they went on, through the constant white fury of the wind and snow gusts, picking their way along the blurred footsteps of the men who had gone before them. They traveled with a rope between them now, bracing themselves with the sharp steel points of their mountain axes, halting at short intervals to breathe in the prescribed manner.

Fencham felt none of his former mental elation experienced on these slopes. His mind was now almost a complete blank, his entire energy and thought gone into the handling of his body, the preservation of himself in the face of the storm. Perhaps an hour before darkness they passed a rock cairn which marked the trail, swung across the bitter, wind swept desolation of another snow field and came thus to Camp 3.

Here a chattering, wild eyed Sherpa cook hunched bleakly over the heat of his Primus in the cook tent, very cold and very alone. The rest had gone on, he told Fencham in answer to his question. Orders had come from above for more porters, the last available oxygen tanks. The attack on the summit? Tomorrow, sahib.

He turned to the stolid *naik*, pointed a gloved thumb toward the wind jerked flaps of the door, and the slopes beyond.

Surabat Taya nodded in confirmation and assent. They went, silently, heads down, bodies bowed forward into the wind, white, snow caked wraiths in the wind swirled fantasies of the snow. Fencham was weary now, weary beyond realization. But it was a new kind of weariness. Hands and feet were heavy, but his body and head were light. Only his extremities were to him alive; the rest of him seemed to be disembodied, to be a void. His ears and face were only a great numbness now, and constantly he changed the ice ax from his right hand to his left hand, for the keen and biting ache of frost bite was in them both.

Their progress was a series of interminable battles—each a pace forward and up. Consciousness had quite nearly left them both; only their inner reason, the warm centers of their being kept them going. Several times Fencham, who had never been so high before, tried to question the *naik* as to their passage, speak with the man. But his icy lips would not function; only mumbling, weak sounds came forth, instantly torn away by the wind. The Gurkha was half leading, half dragging him when at last they crossed the col and came into the lee of a vast ice shoulder where the five little tents hunched like tired and frightened beasts.

Tall Wickerly gently massaged Fencham's hands, his face and ears within the calm and warmth of the big cook tent. They fed him hot pea soup strengthened with a small dash of rum, made him exercise his powerful arms and legs before they thrust him down into the flannel and fleece folds of his sleeping bag.

"Sleep now, lad," suggested Wickerly, grinning down at him calmly. "We're all going to let full out in the morning."

Fencham nodded and rested, made as if to obey, but the pain of his arms and legs withheld him from it. For about half an hour he rested flat on his back, blinking up through sore eyelids at the trembling ceiling of the tent, listening to the mad sonata of the monsoon outside. On the other side of him the two other men rested quietly on their heels in the attitude of peace they had learned from their Gurkha servants. It was Mank who asked:

"Too done-up to finish the thing we were reading last night? I'd like to hear it out before we go—"

"So should I. Wait a moment; I'll find the blessed thing. Here—"

Fencham could hear faint movement as Wickerly crossed the small tent and reached down into his sleeping bag for some object. Then the man's voice came to him, strong, calm, strangely resonant and beautiful in the plangent wind. Most of the words Fencham could not hear, but the lilt of the thing, the march and pause of Wickerly's voice told him that it was poetry. It soothed him, made him drowsy. For longer and longer intervals he dozed off, only to come back and open his eyes to the brightness of the electric lantern hung from the tent pole, hear again the majestic swing of Wickerly's voice. At last, in a short, painful lull in the storm he heard:

> "The oldest hath borne most: we that are young
> Shall never see so much, nor live so long."

There was a snap of a book being closed, a short silence.

"Well, a fitting thing, tonight."

It was Mank who had spoken.

"So. Let's sleep, lad."

The electric lantern flicked out. The three lay in darkness, their bodily warmth like a barrier between them and the monsoon. Fencham was the last to fall asleep; the two lines of poetry that he had heard haunted him until he remembered their source; it was the ending, the last couplet of "King Lear". The Bard, on the upper slopes of Chagu La, while outside was the madness and stridor of the monsoon.

Tell the outside world that and they would laugh; yet it was so. It explained many things to him, that. Things he had asked himself all his life. Down deep, those two, one on each side of him, loved the same things he did, but feared to express themselves, lacked the caste laxity, which was his. And yet, obliquely, strangely, let forth that aching for beauty, that odd nostalgia in mountain climbing, in response to this same tragic, omnipotent beauty that had claimed him wholly since the first day he had seen Chagu La from the plain before the monastery. Men—men such as he. Men— He slept, his consciousness breaking sharply.

THE TENT was a place of pearl shadows when he opened his eyes. Hard, patient fingers pressed his shoulder. Wickerly stood above him, bearded, blond, smiling.

"How are you, fit for fun?"

"Fit as can be!" He wrestled with the intricacies of the sleeping bag. "We're going up?"

"We're going up, at once." The smile had left Wickerly's face. "You're sure you're all right today?"

"Yes."

"Nip along and see what that wild chappie, Kiou, has got for you, then."

"Right."

Fencham came erect, teeth clamped tight so that he would not moan aloud. Pawing back the tent flaps, he stepped outside. The monsoon beat him like a giant hand. A hail of flying snow particles tore at his face, his eyes. He threw up his arms before his face, fled along before it to the cook tent. The half dozen picked Chumbi porters sat stupidly there before the two Primus stoves, eating noisily. Kiou, the flat faced cook, scowled at him, gave him without word a pannikin of hot bouillion, hot bacon, *tzampa* cakes. He ate as the Bhotias ate, wolfishly. The tent flaps pulled back and he looked up. Wickerly stood there, waiting for him.

He swallowed the last mouthful reluctantly, already subconsciously afraid again to face that maelstrom of wind and snow outside. But then memory of why he had come and what he had suffered to do so returned to him and he went out after the other, hurriedly, head down.

In another tent Mank and the *naik*, Surabat Taya, stood, busy greasing faces and hands, strapping on their oxygen tanks, masks and boot crampons.

"Here," said Wickerly, "watch me and do the same."

He did so, wordlessly. The *naik* fitted the oxygen tank straps to his shoulders, showed him how to adjust the mask, the rubber mouthpiece. He took the mask off again for a moment to listen to the tall, now hard faced Wickerly.

"John Mank and I are going on ahead—to the summit. It's today or never; too ruddy cold before and, now that the monsoon's come, ice will begin to loosen up and shift. We have four oxygen tanks apiece; you have five—one disconnected spare for each of us. Your job's to wait below us while we make the final jump. Drag us out if anything should happen. You have that, Fencham?"

"Right!"

"All right; rope up. Good man, Fencham! I see the *naik's* taught you well. You're last man, Surabat Taya. Ready? Let's go!"

Wickerly smiled briefly at them, slipped his own mask into place. He stooped, picked up ice ax and sharp pointed wooden traverse pegs, went out through the door. In a silent, stumbling line they followed. A great warm glow was over Fencham; blood sang in his brain, in his pulse. He—he and these other three stout men were going to conquer Chagu La, Queen and Keeper of the Winds, Mother of the Monsoon! He, who loved the mountain as he had never been capable of loving any other thing. A love almost greater than his love of life. A thing of destiny, a thing quite beyond his own finite understanding.

The wind caught at him bitterly and terribly. He braced against it, drove on, feeling warm, confident, strong, his body made supple again by the exercise. They walked through a perpetual swirl and storming of snow. Only vaguely could he make out the form of Mank ahead, and only by an occasional tugging on the line as the Gurkha slipped momentarily could he tell that the *naik* was behind him. Wickerly, the man they implicitly followed, was completely out of sight.

Ahead, Mank stopped. Fencham went

on a pace or so until he stood at the other man's heels. The younger man pointed up. Before them lay a slanting white face of ice and wind packed snow. In the Bernese Alps, and here in his two bitter and thorough weeks of apprenticeship, Fencham had learned what that meant. They must dig a series of hand and foot holds in a traverse across its face, and thus surmount it.

Already big Wickerly was assaulting it with the steel prong of his ax, digging the first few holes. He stopped, stood back, conserving his energy. Mank, too, took his turn. Then, without hesitation, knowing his own handiwork and that of his old companion, Wickerly started up, inch by inch, foot by foot. Mank followed agilely. For just a moment Fencham hesitated. If he should slip, he would take the other three. He tried to curse his own cowardice, and he gagged on the rubber mouthpiece of the mask. Surabat Taya was nudging him gently from behind and he went on, up, up . . .

Another field of broken ice, shattered *seracs*, snow filtered limestone chunks. They walked very slowly now, reeling just a bit, half stupid with the pain of the low pressure, the ordeal of the monsoon. They gathered together for warmth and Wickerly held out in his palm the little officially sealed barometer which showed the altitude they had attained. Fencham leaned down, but could not read the thing, shook his head to signify as much.

Wickerly bent over and with the thumb of his glove drew the figures in the snow—19,142 feet. Fencham's throat constricted, a warm shudder shook him. That next broken, precipitous slope of jagged limestone and ice must be the ultimate, the summit, then! His hand shaking just a bit, he pointed upward, indicating the eight hundred feet left above. Slowly, Wickerly inclined his head. Then stepped onward once more, bent over with the terrible pain of the monsoon thrusts.

The last cliff was before them now, immense, sheer, a brown and white patchwork of ice and cracked limestone slag. For perhaps five minutes, motionless, the four stood studying it. Fencham knew what was in all their brains. Last year three men had got this far, gone up, slipped, and all gone sickeningly to their deaths, bound together with their Alpine body rope. And now—

But Wickerly knew this place. He had stood here last year when those three had whirled past him into black space. He knew the treachery of the Queen and Keeper of the Winds, jealous Mother of the Monsoon. He knew how to circumvent her, get around that spot of death.

He turned abruptly, tapped Fencham on the shoulder, indicated his spare oxygen tank. Fencham, weak and stupid now with the mountain sickness, shook his head, jerked his hands toward the summit. Wickerly moved his head sidewise in negation. No; this was where he and Mank, the two highly skilful and powerful ones, went on alone.

Already Mank and the *naik* were taking the spare tank from his back, fitting it into the steel frame on Wickerly's broad shoulders. Mank received his own from the shuddering Gurkha. The Alpine body rope dropped to the snow. There was no gesture of leave taking; gestures were precious energy. Wickerly swung ahead, Mank a yard behind him.

A GLOVED hand caught at Fencham's numb arm; the Gurkha pulled him back from the face of that weird, terrible cliff. The two were going up, up, up. Snow was like smoke about them; for long moments their dark bodies were all but obscured.

Surabat Taya, the *naik*, heard the slip and crash of loosened stones and ice first, ripped off his goggles and mask to scream and shout at the mountain demons. Great boulders thumped and slammed about them; the two crouched, gasping. Then, as it had begun, it stopped. There was only the moaning of the monsoon, the soft fluttering sound of the drifting snow. Above on the steep slope was a great brown gash, path of the avalanche.

Barbs of fear, of awful nausea, caught at Fencham's stomach. He lay on the snow, writhing, mumbling madly into the frozen palms of his gloves. A voice screamed in his ear. He rolled aside to avoid it. Once more it pierced his fuddled, aching brain. He stared up. The *naik*, Surabat Taya, stood above him, and in the open palm of his glove was the small black metal aneroid barometer. That, and nothing else, was left of those two men who twenty minutes before had gone from them.

Fencham shook his head, made hysterical gestures with his hands. The bare faced *naik* tapped him again on the shoulder, gestured upward, toward the summit of the Mother of the Monsoon. Fencham did nothing but open and shut his hands, point downward, as they had come—toward warmth, toward life, toward peace from this cruel breast of death.

Surabat Taya turned silently from him, picked up ice ax and goggles. Fencham, understanding, a chill grip of fear about his heart, ran stumbling toward him, tried to hold him back. Gently, the *naik* released himself, brought back his shoulders, his head, walked straight toward that place where were still the footmarks of those two men.

Time and again Fencham tried to withdraw his eyes from the man. But a strange, deadly magnetism brought his eyes upward, held them there. The Gurkha had reached the foot of that great brown gash now, was attempting to parallel it. One stone creaked loose. Another. Another. Arms out as if in supplication, the *naik* Surabat Taya, mountain man and soldier, turned and jumped.

Spectra wheeled and broke flashingly before Fencham's eyes. There was a thunder as of many drums in his brain. He tottered, fell, heard the great stones crack and whine about him.. Once more there was only the cacaphony of the monsoon, the silt and sift of snow. He came to his feet, knotted and constricted with pain. A brown and huddled thing lay some twenty yards from him, half buried in the frozen snow.

As if tranced, he went slowly to it. Surabat Taya was dead, his neck broken. Gradually, Fencham began to retreat. A small black object lay in the platinum sheet of the snow before him. He closed his eyes, opened them, pawed at his face with shaking hands. He reached down and picked it up, looked stupidly at the dial face of the thing, up at the mountain, which he had loved as he had never loved any other thing.

With fumbling hands, he found a pocket in his suit, put the aneroid within it. As he had been taught to do, mechanically, he looked down at the flow meter of his oxygen tanks; still one-third full. His hands opened and shut once; he wished for a moment that there was some one he might speak to.

Then he turned and faced the cliff, walked very slowly and calmly toward it. He felt no fear as he climbed. He felt no exultation when he attained the summit and lay gasping there, the wind roaring and screaming about him. All feeling, all emotion, had left him. Only two thoughts were within him: he had conquered the mountain, and he was no longer a coward.

But, very gradually, strange visions, weird echoes of all he had dreamed and thought, came to him while he lay there in that place of mad winds. Once he stood up and cried aloud at the imagined beauty of the mountains below him, stretching afar off to the purple plains of India, the green reaches of the Kashmir uplands. Like sunset colors on a dusk sea the chimera left him and he was quite calm again, quite aware of what he had done, and what he must do, for not yet had he wholly conquered the mountain.

He was not a mountain climber, such as Wickerly, such as Mank, had been; to him the finer subtleties of a successful descent were unknown. But he was shrewd with the wild power of his victory, keenly cautious with the bitterness of his hatred for this mountain which he had so loved. Not until he reached the limestone shale and vast boulders of the west col did his resistance break. He sang and danced and waved his arms in the snow flurries as he walked then, for he had conquered this place, conquered . . .

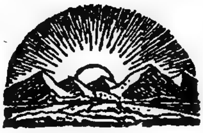
Before the bright crimson flaps of the ook tent stood the colonel, face and lips shen with the tremendous strain of his orced, unbroken ascent from the base amp. Hours before, Kiou, the wild yed Sherpa cook, had broken in screamng upon the porters of the third camp. Two words only had they been able o get from him—avalanche and death. Those two words had brought the olonel up here, overtaxed heart poundng and burning within him. He had ome alone, and would now go on alone, for there was no man who could go with him.

"Aie! Aie! Sahib!"

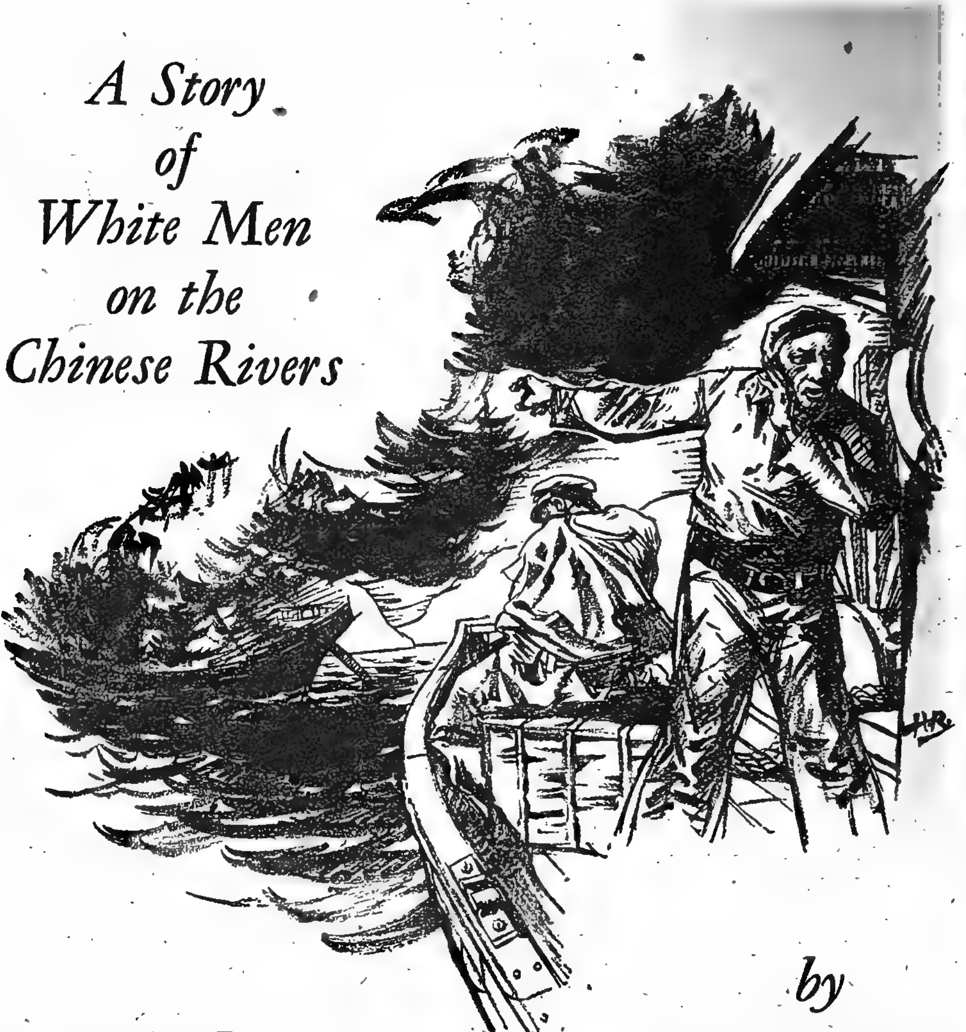
It was again Kiou, gesticulating, mouthing. The colonel stared, ran. The last of his strength went from Fencham as the colonel caught at him, held him up. In the cook tent, beside the Primus stoves, they chafed his hands and feet, his frost bitten nose and ears. It was an hour before he could move, before words came from his blackened, cracked lips. From a side pocket of his torn, blood caked windproof he painfully pulled a small steel object, dropped it into the colonel's hands. He rolled over on his side so that he might look full up into the other man's face.

"Mine eyes," he muttered harshly, "mine eyes have seen the glory—"

Then he dropped back and the warm folds of a deep and peaceful sleep were about him closely.



A Story of White Men on the Chinese Rivers



HU CHUA

by

RALPH R. PERRY

EVANS had shot Hu Chua through the arm. Twice Hu Chua had all but captured the *Firefly*, of which the first consequence would have been the slitting of Captain Sandy Evans's throat. And yet, between the Yankee skipper of the fifty ton river steamer and the Chinese war lord of seven villages, was developing that grim respect which is the noblest emotion born of war.

Around them white men and yellow schemed, labored, fought and murdered for ideals—and for loot. The Cantonese army was sweeping northward to make China a nation. Incited by that struggle, demagogues screamed, "China for the Chinese". Mobs of coolies murdered missionaries who sought to heal the sick. Mandarins talked of agrarian programs, of education—and strove to enrich themselves while they remained in office through the traffic in opium that flowed down the Yangtze-Kiang. Freights on the drug rose to five hundred and sixty dollars a ton—a fortune for venal skippers.

White and yellow men alike were mad

over the opportunities, honorable and the reverse, which arise in a civil war. And meanwhile, at a bend in the Yangtze-Kiang two hundred miles above Hankow, a thousand miles from the seacoast, Evans and Hu Chua fought a duel of their own.

Every third week Evans left Hankow with a cargo of medicine and supplies. His destination was the American mission near Chungking, where there was bubonic plague and smallpox. There was plague all through the province of Szechuen, for that matter; but a handful of doctors and nurses can treat only as many patients as their beds will hold. So much, however, they were determined to do as long as Evans could run Hu Chua's gauntlet, and the mobs at Chungking kept on the far side of the mission compound wall.

When Evans accepted the charter, Lloyds canceled his insurance. He tore the letter up and continued his preparations. The *Firefly* was his own to risk as he pleased. Against the dangers of piracy he mounted two machine guns and rigged a pipeline around the bulwark of the ship, which would squirt steam and boiling water upon any Chinese who tried to board.

Over the other intimation in the insurance company's letter—that Lloyds feared he planned to run opium, which would result eventually in the confiscation of his ship—he shrugged his shoulders. Evans was a gaunt, red headed State of Maine Yankee, six feet two in his boots, tough as an ox yoke, and of a conscientious, straightforward breed that may countenance smuggling, but never drugs.

Why he chose to risk his ship he was careful not to say. He was a close mouthed Yankee and would much rather have died than admit he was running the river for reasons not commercial. A nurse in the Chungking hospital was his girl.

Grace Peck refused to leave her post until the mission was formally abandoned. Smallpox? Mobs? Those dangers were part of the routine of a nurse in the foreign field. Evans argued and stormed, talked common sense and, when Grace still refused, called her obstinate and walked out to sign the charter with the head of the mission.

If she was going to stay, so was he. If she thought more of yellow brats than she did of him, just because they were sick . . . Well, no, that was not fair. Could not very well let a sick baby die, even though other babies were dying all over China. If Grace had to stay, then he would see to it that she got the medicine she needed—and have a steamer for her to leave on if the mission had to be abandoned. The roads were not safe. Even the river was—er—lively.

To start a ding-dong battle with a river pirate is a strange form of love making, but it was Evans' way. Although he did not mention Hu Chua to Grace by name, he had that war lord ticketed as his most dangerous enemy. "Paw of the Tiger" is a literal translation of the name, and Hu Chua had earned the sobriquet. Though many chieftains along the Yangtze-Kiang were pirates and bandits when opportunity favored, Hu Chua was noted for making his own opportunities and pushing ing his attacks home.

Once Evans abandoned general freighting and devoted himself to transporting supplies for the hospital, the war lord made the river far "livelier" than the red headed skipper had anticipated. A steamer, machine guns, medicine, were priceless in China. Evans had no idea just what the war lord wanted. Whatever it was, the first two trips upriver proved it was desired most desperately.

ON THE first, Hu Chua and fifty men had put out from the bank in boats when the *Firefly* rounded the bend. They drifted downstream like peaceful Chinese coolies carrying their produce to market, until they surrounded the steamer. Then a stink-pot was hurled on her deck, and as fast as the Chinese could ply their oars they pulled up to board with knife and hatchet while the fumes of their bomb incapacitated Evans' crew.

A machine gun changed their triumphant yells to shrieks of terror. Gagging from the stench, his eyes streaming, Evans gave the nearest boat a fifty shot burst. It slewed broadside. The rowers, killed to a man, drooped over their oars and the boat drifted astern. The rest turned about, the brown river foaming white as the oars frantically backed water, and pulled for shore. In the stern of the stricken boat a man dressed in white silk pulled himself to a sitting position. His hand was pressed to his left arm; he was still close enough for Sandy to see the blood dyeing the jacket and oozing between the slender yellow fingers.

" 'E's the beggar! 'E's Hu Chua 'imself," gasped Coster Harris.

The cockney mate lifted off the drum of the gun, snapped another in place. His pale blue eyes were wild with excitement. He shook Evans by the shoulder, pointing downstream with a jabbing forefinger.

"Kill the beggar! 'E's—"

"Out of range," said Evans calmly. "Guess he's learned his lesson anyhow."

Later the red headed skipper would never have underestimated his foeman to such an extent. The lesson Hu Chua had learned was that an attempt to board a steamer from small boats is futile, if she carries two Lewis guns handy in the pilot house. The Chinese let her pass downstream unmolested, but on her second trip up there was a chain stretched across the narrowest part of the channel.

Fortunately the time was sunset. The ripple in the water caught Evans' eye. He reversed his engines and stopped his boat before she reached the obstruction. Had the *Firefly* run upon the chain at full speed she would probably have been capsized.

After an hour's delay Evans found another channel through the sand bars above the bend. Fully a hundred coolies in their indigo dyed cotton coats stood on the bank and watched. As Sandy steamed upriver, a man in white, wearing his left arm in a sling, joined the crowd. Not a shot was fired. On the downriver trip a week later, the chain had been removed.

" 'E's a sportin' beggar," Coster remarked.

"Must want our cargo. Knows we're running empty," Sandy answered.

The cockney's reply was in two words, spoken barely above a whisper.

"And why?" he said, with a significance that made the skipper whirl to face him, level eyed.

Coster did not meet that look of searching inquiry and suspicion. He stared off across the country that rolled in gentle hills back from the river bank. Scarcely a foot of the landscape was green. As far as the eye could see, poppies grew everywhere.

Masses of bloom carpeted the earth in a pattern of which the background was white—the predominating color of the opium poppy—but with patches of scarlet, purple, crimson and pink. Millions of flowers, varied in color, but all alike in that each would yield a drop or two of milky juice to become the black, tarlike opium of commerce.

"Five hundred and sixty dollars a ton for freight alone," breathed the cockney. "We, wot runs for 'umanitarian reasons—" Harris made the long word seem longer by touching it faintly with scorn—"get passed at the customs 'n' could save the duty of eight hundred more. Fifty thousand a trip we could clear, an' gor'blimey, we run *empty!*"

Still he seemed to study the poppy fields, but in his sidelong fashion he was watching the skipper.

"We've myde two trips. No need actin' innocent," he continued more boldly. "I know some big wigs—'igh up chink hofficials—as would 'elp."

"You're talkin' too much," said Evans.

* * *

HE KNEW little of his mate beyond the fact that Harris was an excellent river pilot, who had been master of an ocean going steamer before he yielded to the vices of the Orient. Physically, the cockney was a big man. He was only fifty. The drooping mustache that seemed too heavy for his face was still more brown than gray, but the tremble of his hands, the fattish waist and the network of blue veins across his nose told an unmistakable story. He was not a formidable character, and his last frank hint that he was already in touch with opium freighters puzzled Evans.

"I'm goin' to do more than talk! I can't wyte no longer," retorted the cockney, with the desperation of a weak man who knows he is facing a strong one. "If you're goin' to run opium, do it now!"

"I ain't—but why?" said Evans.

"'Cos I got to have five 'undred pounds quick. My darter in London, she's sick. She wrote 'er old daddy—"

"You're a liar. That's an old stall," snapped the skipper.

"Maybe I'm a liar, but gor'blimey, that's the truth," Harris retorted doggedly. "I got to get five 'undred pounds quick, 'n' I thought you was goin' to run opium, like every other steamer on the river."

"I'm not. If you don't like it, quit!"

The cockney shrugged his shoulders.

"Where can I get a big lay inside of three weeks?" he demanded.

"You can't," said Evans.

He was studying the older man keenly now. Harris was wrecked by vice, but in his blue eyes the skipper read a desperation that convinced him that Harris did have a daughter, who did need money, and that the mate would go to any length to get it. With all his faults, Harris knew the river, and was not a coward.

"Look here," Evans went on. "I can't run drugs, because I can't have my boat confiscated. She's needed upriver. So that's out. We're going to Hankow now. If you're not satisfied with mate's wages, quit when we get there. That's all you're going to get aboard the *Firefly*, and you'll have to fight Hu Chua every run to draw those . . . Wonder why that chink pirate wears mourning? White's the color of mourning in China, you know."

"Hi don't give a damn!" retorted the mate sulkily. "'Struth, I'm a-goin' to look haround in 'Ankow!"

"That's the understanding." Evans nodded, and dismissed the matter from his mind.

Already he was thinking of plans to checkmate Hu Chua's third attack. That there would be one Evans had not the slightest doubt, and the enemy seemed a matter far more worth his thought than the desperation or need of money on the part of his second in command.

Yet in this Evans was mistaken. There is nothing more dangerous than a man weak, covetous, and desperate, who holds a position of trust. When Harris came aboard the *Firefly* at the start of her third trip upriver, Evans considered the matter closed. The facts were quite the opposite.

Harris had received his five hundred pounds and cabled them to his daughter in London. In return he had come to an understanding with a Chinese official who was very "'igh up", and a white man named Saigon Russell.

Saigon was to pick up a hard case crew of white men, sail upriver to Chungking and be waiting at the mission when the *Firefly* arrived. Harris was to let the party on board while Evans was busy ashore.

"Tell him we're refugees if he lamps any of the crew," Saigon had growled. "He'll know we ain't as soon as he sees *my* mug."

"I 'opes you won't kill 'im," said Harris.

He had his five hundred pounds and, being weak, the fashion in which he was betraying Evans turned him cold. Saigon was a murderous brute.

"Hope so myself. But I been afoul of Sandy Evans before," growled Saigon. "If we do get aboard peaceable, stand behind him to grab his gun when I tell him what's what. Otherwise he's just as liable to shoot me."

The Chinese official smiled blandly. He was a realist. Over what might happen to Evans—or to Harris and Saigon, for that matter—he did not concern himself in the least. He had arranged an attempt to capture the *Firefly* which would cost him a thousand pounds all told. If Saigon's ruse succeeded, the first trip of the vessel would net the official ten thousand pounds. With a ten to one gamble he was perfectly satisfied.

On this third trip upriver Sandy Evans had decided to run by Hu Chua's villages at night. He knew that the war lord would have news of his coming. Both the previous attacks had been perfectly timed, but in darkness Evans believed the Chinese would find it harder to lead a horde of coolies who were unaccustomed to fighting on water, while Evans could handle and defend the *Firefly* as well as by day.

When he approached the bend in the Yangtze-Kiang, however, he found the night rather too dark to suit him. It was velvety black and very still. There was not even the gleam of a star on the surface of the river.

The whisper of the current along the shore, the suck and gurgle of an eddy as the *Firefly* nosed cautiously around the bend, the scrape of a fireman's shovel in the engine room, whispers from the men on deck, floated up to Sandy's ears, each sound identified and dismissed as harmless.

"Nothing ahead," the low lookout whispered.

FOR FEAR of a barrier chain Sandy reduced speed until the steamer was barely more than holding her own with the current, yet with the broad river opening up ahead, he, himself, could see there was nothing dangerous afloat in his path. No junk; no boats even. No long, straight ripple on the surface such as a chain will make. Nothing but the occasional dark blur of some object floating gently downstream with the current.

The *Firefly* had nosed past what Sandy had learned to consider the area of danger; therefore the attack came with the sudden horror of a nightmare.

"Jeest!" screamed the lookout.

The flame of his revolver stabbed the darkness; he flung up both arms and toppled backward with a knife in his throat. Straight over the bow climbed a Chinese, naked save for a loin cloth. At the bow and along both port and starboard sides, dozens of yellow hands gripped the rail. Pigtailed heads bobbed into sight. From stem to stern the *Firefly* was boarded by a swarm of yellow, naked men who seemed to rise from the river. Hands, heads, shoulders; a flash of knives, a simultaneous swing of legs over the rail. And on board, a crew that stared and gasped from sheer surprise; then a scattering *pop pop* of revolver shots, unaimed, without effect.

Evans jerked the steam line open. The boarders were engulfed in a hiss and roar of vapor. The Chinese already on deck plunged toward the pilot house. Evans sprang out. A knife lunged at his stomach. He knocked the steel aside with a sweep of his revolver, smashed his left fist into the yellow face and, as the owner staggered, struck with his right.

The barrel of the revolver jarred on bone. With blood streaming from his forehead the Chinese went down. Steam was blowing across the deck in clouds. Shouts and screams of agony made an uproar that one man's voice could scarcely transcend.

"Hold the bow and drive them aft!" Sandy bellowed.

He caught at some one's shoulder, knew he held one of his own crew because his fingers touched cloth, found he had clutched Coster Harris. He pushed the mate aft.

"Nothin' this way—I just came for'ard!" the cockney yelled.

The rush of steam through so many jets was rapidly exhausting the boilers. Certain that most, if not all the Chinese had been scalded from the rail, and not caring to drift downstream without power, Sandy ran to the pilot house and closed the valve. The roaring died away in a prolonged hiss. The steam lifted to disclose the decks still in possession of the *Firefly's* crew.

Amidships a coolie was writhing, blinded by his burns. He squirmed to the rail and flung himself into the river, shrieking as the water touched his burned flesh. Near the stern a random bullet had accounted for a second coolie. At the bow the man Sandy had knocked senseless groaned and stirred.

Out of an attack made by at least thirty men, only those three had crossed the rail. Hot steam is more than flesh and blood can stand. Aboard the *Firefly* the dead lookout was the only casualty.

"How in the blinkin' 'ell did they do it?" Harris asked slowly. "I 'eard the lookout yell, and *phfut!* By the time I ran for'ard it was over."

"They were swimming, holding on to a long rope, I guess," said Sandy. "Or rather floating down with the current. They never made so much as a splash. Our bow struck the rope in the center, and as we forged ahead it wrapped around us, bringing the swimmers with it."

"Gor'blimey, the trick should have worked," said the cockney.

His sincerity was so genuine that Evans grinned. The cockney picked up a boat hook and began to fish over the side in order to get the line before it should foul the propeller. He was coiling fathom after fathom of grass rope about an inch in diameter when the red headed skipper started toward the sole surviving Chinese.

Much to Evans' surprise the latter staggered erect as he drew near. Carelessly the skipper drew his revolver. The man was not much more than able to stand, and Evans was wondering what to do with him. To turn him over to the Chinese authorities would mean death, and while a pirate deserves no mercy, to execute a coolie accomplishes nothing.

"What master you?" Evans asked.

"Hu Chua," the Chinese answered.

He spoke like one who understood perfectly and was quite unafraid, which made Evans peer at him in the dim light. Blood from the bruised forehead masked his features, but the Chinese was a man of thirty, above the average in height and breadth of shoulder, with knots of muscle standing out on his naked arms and legs. On the left arm—Evans' revolver lifted swiftly into line with the other's heart—was the pucker of a bullet wound, recently healed.

"You are Hu Chua—the Paw of the Tiger himself!" Evans said. "So our fight is finished."

THE MAN who had made himself war lord of seven villages nodded. He did not attempt to deny the statement, nor did he ask for mercy. Either would have been useless. His eyelids merely closed, and opened, yet Evans sensed that the moment was tense; that Hu Chua had reached a decision.

"Finished," the Chinese answered. Not in pidgin, but in English spoken in the clipped, liquid accents of the educated Oriental. "Your las' tlip, Captain. I lose."

"Last trip nothing," snapped Evans, though the composure of the Chinese disturbed him.

"Las' tlip. To Chungking comes Lu Chen, with ten thousand soldier. The missions—" Hu Chua's hand moved like one who tosses a wisp of dried grass into the wind.

"Gone," he said. "We fight well, Captain. But—finished. No more chance."

For an instant he looked into Evans' eyes; then flung himself backward over the rail into the river.

"Why the blinkin' hell didn't you shoot?" screamed Harris, flinging down his coil of rope.

Evans stared at the revolver in his hand.

"I think because he expected I was going to, and didn't care," he answered slowly. "He was—hopeless about something. Not because he expected a bullet, either. He said a general named Lu Chen was going to wipe out the missions."

"Think he'll drown?"

"Hu Chua? No."

"You act pleased," the cockney sneered.

"I am," said Evans.

"Probably he lied."

"What's it to you?" the red headed skipper retorted. "He didn't. Too much of a man. He thought he was as good as dead, and he was too discouraged over not getting this boat to care. Figure that out. He ain't licked now any more than he was twice before. No, Mister, he was tellin' the truth—just to do me a favor!"

"I hopes the mission believes it," said the cockney sarcastically.

For the sake of earning his five hundred pounds Harris did not want the *Firefly* loaded with refugees on her trip downriver.

"They've got to," said Evans.

Yet even then, in the strength of his own conviction, he realized they would not.

Nor did they. While the *Firefly* was being unloaded at the mission Evans tasted the cup of bitterness which Cassandra drained. The missionary in charge was a thin, bloodless little man, utterly fearless of this world because his thoughts were of the next. He was very polite, but . . .

Mr. Evans did not understand there had been thousands of such rumors. To be sure, General Lu Chen was approaching the city. In two weeks he was expected to arrive. The mission's converts were much alarmed. In times of stress a new convert tends to placate the old gods, did not Mr. Evans think so? Really, rumors were not to be counted on. If Mr. Evans did not want to come upriver again . . .

Evans made hoarse noises in his throat and left the room. Grace Peck was on day duty, and he had to wait until twilight before he could see her. He passed the time pacing up and down the compound in the bright sun. Faintly the noise of firecrackers being exploded in the city outside the walls came to his ears. The explosions sounded to him like gun shots. His imagination placed yellow hands on top of the walls, hands such as had clutched the rail of the *Firefly*. There was not a gun in the mission! These missionaries could not—would not fight. Evans was haggard when twilight came at last, and Grace Peck walked slowly out of the door and dropped into a cane chair on the veranda.

"You've got to go back with me," he said harshly.

Grace shook her head. She was too tired to argue or to move. She lay in the chair as though her bones were fluid. Her lips were parted, and her dark head never lifted from the head rest. She lay a little on one side so that her eyes, larger and darker than Evans had ever seen them, could watch his face.

"You mustn't let things get you, Sandy," she whispered. "The whole mission knows what you said to Dr. Morse. They've been watching you all day. There's no danger, Sandy. Only work . . . I'm so tired . . . I've seen so many die . . . Babies, Sandy, that can't understand why or what it is that hurts them. That only suffer, and cry. We can't leave, dear."

"But a Chinese too brave to lie . . ."

"Please forget Hu Chua," the girl whispered. "Were you ever in San Francisco, Sandy? I was born there. If I could only stand on the hill at the head of Fillmore Street tonight. The fog would be rolling in now, moist and cool on my cheek. Only the rumble of the cable cars and the lights across the Bay. I'd like to go home, Sandy."

"I won't take the *Firefly* downriver until you are on board," said Evans.

She rose.

"I wish you would," she said firmly. "Don't fail the doctor—and me. It's—a kind of war, Sandy."

"I stay. It'll be a kind of war you never dreamed of," Evans said.

But she would not listen. The *Firefly* was to sail that night. He ought *to go*. After a time she bade him go.

YET EVANS, when he walked back to his ship in the dark, *had* no intention of leaving until Lu Chen had come and gone, though it were a month. He stepped aboard the *Firefly* so wrapped in his thoughts that he did not notice that there were an unusual number of men aboard her. Indeed, he saw nothing amiss until he strode into the pilot house and came face to face with Saigon Russell. Harris stood beside the burly pirate, chalk faced, shifting his weight nervously from one foot to the other.

"Put this man ashore," said Evans. He knew Saigon.

"'E's a refugee," the cockney began in an excited whine.

Saigon never let the mate finish. He jerked a revolver from the waistband of his trousers and thrust the muzzle against Evans' stomach.

"Too late, Skipper," he said grimly. "I need your ship."

A half second later Evans reached for his hip. He almost died in his tracks. The will to shoot was in Saigon's eyes, but Harris shouldered between them, seizing Evans around the arms and body and using his greater weight to hold the red headed skipper.

"Told you not to kill 'im," the cockney panted. "Hold still," he whispered into Evans' ear. "We're just goin' to run one cargo of opium."

Evans did not cry out. He even stopped struggling. A trip to Hankow and back would take time enough to deliver Grace Peck and the mission into the hands of Lu Chen, but he could not see how he would improve matters by taking a bullet through his belly.

"Saigon won't play square, even with a Judas," he told the mate. "Have you bribed the crew?"

"My men'll tend to that," Saigon chuckled. "Cast off, Harris."

The mate walked outside and shouted the orders. The *Firefly* nosed slowly out into the river current, while Saigon kept the muzzle of his gun jammed against Evans' belly. Once out in the stream, however, the big pirate pocketed the weapon.

"Now yell your head off," he grunted, and grinned when Evans merely shrugged. "If you act sensible I can use you," he went on. "They might wonder at the customs how I come to be skipper."

"You're a damn', dirty, doublecrossing dog," Evans retorted. "You've as good as murdered every man and woman in that mission—including my girl."

"Aw, get another." Saigon chuckled.

He stood with his hands on his hips and a self-satisfied grin on his face. Clothed in nothing save a pair of dirty duck trousers and a ragged singlet, matted hair burst through every rent in the cloth. Saigon was tough, hairy, dirty, and proud of it.

"Hope Hu Chua gets you," said Evans. He was white with anger.

The big pirate guffawed.

"Hu Chua never stops boats goin' downriver," he jeered. "Step below, Skipper, while I lock you in your own handcuffs!"

Failure that is final, bitter, and without remedy gives rise to emotions too intense to endure. They merge into apathy. For perhaps an hour Evans sat on his bunk and stared at the irons on his wrists. Upriver, Grace would wait for the next appearance of a boat which would never arrive again. She was tired and frail. What would happen to her when warmer weather made the plague more virulent and when supplies and medicine dwindled? Even if Hu Chua were wrong, and Lu Chen were not coming to lead his hordes over the mission wall?

Such reflections bring a man close to insanity. Evans realized that Saigon would probably kill him sooner or later, but that seemed a very small thing. The real bitterness of his situation was the underhand manner in which he had been betrayed. Sold because Harris wanted five hundred pounds. Sold that a gang of pirates might make dirty money running drugs. Evans considered himself as good as dead, but if he had to die, he wanted to die clean. If he had to fail, he wanted to fail in a way that would let him retain Grace's respect, at least.

For five days he sat in his room with nothing to do but think. The *Firefly* spent one day loading opium. The rest of the time she rushed downstream at full power, aided by the current. Evans watched the shore slide by the porthole.

He waited impatiently till he marked the landmarks about the bend in the river where he had fought Hu Chua. Then he caught the knob of his door in both hands and wrenched the lock out of the wood. Swiftly he walked aft and on to the deck. He had neither illusions nor hope. He expected nothing. He simply preferred defeat at the hands of an honest, hard fighting enemy to the doublecross.

Running to the stern of the boat he snatched up the mooring lines and tumbled them over the side on to the propeller. A bullet sang by his head. One of Saigon's sailors snatched up a club and sprang for him, but before Evans was stretched senseless on the deck he had the satisfaction of seeing the propeller fouled.

The *Firefly's* engines stopped. She turned broadside to the current, and in spite of frantic efforts on the part of Saigon and Harris to keep her in the center of the river, she drifted aground on the sand bars above the bend.

EVANS recovered consciousness in the midst of a very pretty fight. From the pilot house of the stranded ship a machine gun raked the river bank. No Chinese were in sight, but the occasional report of an old fashioned heavy caliber rifle, and a slug which ripped splinters from the *Firefly's* superstructure, proved that Hu Chua had seized his opportunity.

Saigon and three men crouched behind the rail a yard from Evans. They carried hatchets, and as he opened his eyes they sprang over the rail waist deep into the water to cut the propeller clear.

The guns of the Chinese spoke briskly for a minute. Under the stern there was frantic splashing, the thud of a hatchet; then, accompanied by shrill, triumphant yells from the shore, the firing died down. Saigon and his three men did not appear. Riddled by bullets, their bodies drifted downstream, and no more volunteers jumped over the stern to complete the work they had scarcely started before they died.

Evans lay quietly where he was. He saw Harris poke a face, blanched with terror, out of the pilot house, but until thick, oily smoke rolled over the rail, the red headed skipper wondered over the cause of the cockney's panic. Hu Chua would be too wise to attempt to rush the ship in the face of two machine guns, even if he were able to prevent Harris from getting the vessel off the shore.

The smell of smoke brought Evans to his feet. Upstream a boat loaded with oil drenched straw was blazing furiously. Very slowly it was moving down upon the *Firefly*. Coolies controlled the progress of the fire boat by means of a rope attached to the stern, but although they offered a fair mark, not a man on the *Firefly* pulled trigger. The steamer was wooden, and old. If the boatload of blazing straw drifted alongside her she would burn like a torch.

"Surrender?" cried a voice that Evans knew. "Jump off ship! Walk up bank!"

It was done. Man by man the crew of the *Firefly* leaped over the stern. What captivity or death they were going to they did not know, but the alternative was to be burned alive. They did not linger. Evans waited until Harris had left the ship, then scrambled up the bank in the rear of the procession. The skipper's hands were ironed. He sought to remain in the rear of the crowd, but Hu Chua beckoned him forward.

Though the Chinese carried a revolver, he still wore the white robes which are the color of mourning. Behind him a hundred coolies, armed with rifles, were drawn up in a ragged semicircle. In front the crew of the *Firefly* huddled as close together as they could.

"Handcuffs?" questioned Hu Chua.

Evans' voice stuck in his throat, for the black eyes probed him to the bone.

"The men you shot stole my ship," he answered. "She carries opium."

"You thlew ropes into the water."

"My—" Evans hesitated. How could he make a Chinese understand what Grace Peck was to him? "My—woman," he went on, "is at Chungking. Lu Chen comes close."

Hu Chua nodded gravely.

"They would not return," Evans said. "Rather than give them my ship, I gave her to you. Three times you fought for her."

"Your woman? Only that?" Hu Chua answered. "I do not understand. I do not want a ship, or opium."

Evans' jaw dropped. The Chinese corroborated the statement by a nod, and gravely touched his mourning robe.

"I had eleven sons," he said. "Smallpox left me two. Last week those two sickened like their brothers."

"'Struth! 'E means plague's been killin' 'is 'ole damn' family!" whispered Harris.

"You pass upriver with medicine that works magic, as I have seen in missions," the Chinese went on. "I have many enemies. I can not buy. Thlee times I try to take."

Hu Chua's hand moved as though he were tossing a wisp of dried grass into the wind.

"What good a ship? Or opium?" he asked. "I will have no sons!"

"Say, if you'd told me that night on deck—"

"Does one talk with a knife at the throat?"

"This one does," said Evans firmly. "My woman is a nurse. Put your sons on board and I'll carry them back to Chungking."

Hu Chua shook his head.

"Enemies would know the cubs of the Tiger," he remarked proudly. "Lu Chen is close. Take me and my men to Chungking. Bring back your woman, and who else will come."

It was Evans' turn to hesitate. Put Grace in a shipload of Chinese cutthroats? Never that! But was he? Rather, would he not be intrusting her to the gratitude of a brave enemy?

"You're on. Put your sons and your men aboard," Evans said.

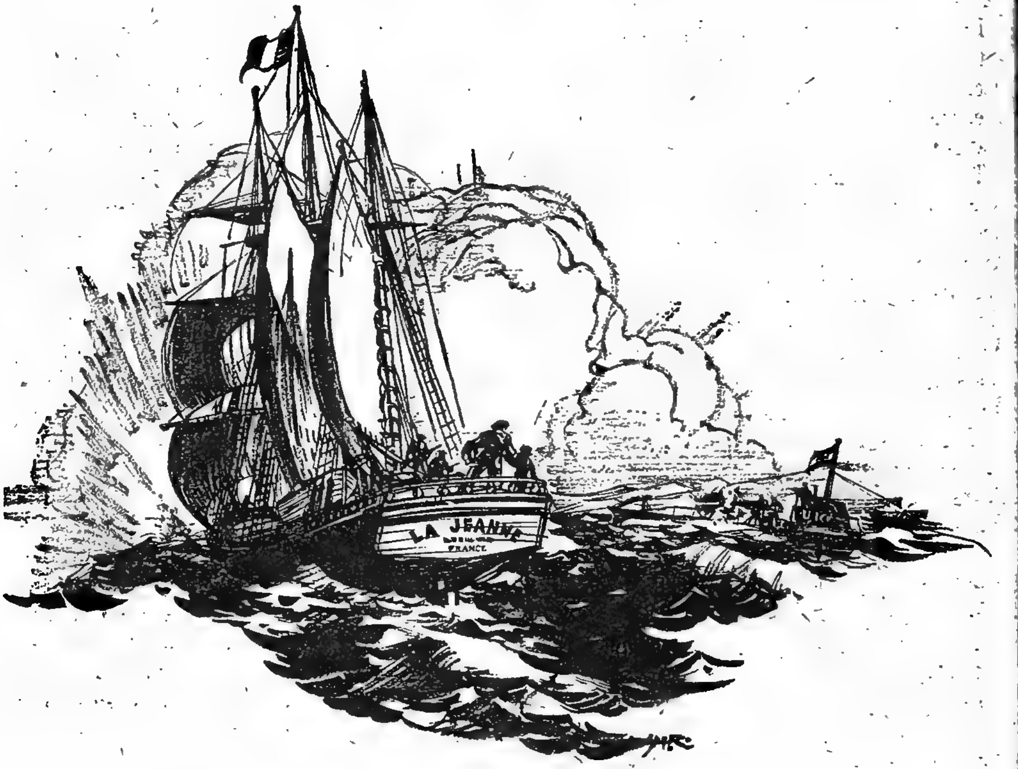
Hu Chua must have understood the Yankee's momentary hesitation, for he nodded gravely.

"The snake is always a snake; but the paw of the tiger may stroke softly," he quoted.

A Story of Strategy and a Submarine

OFF SHORE

By GEORGES SURDEZ



IN THE spacious, mahogany paneled cabin aft of *La Jeanne,* at the table beneath the steady, pendulum swing of the great brass suspension lamp, Yves Le Konnec was finishing lunch. The lad who served him placed a cup of black coffee within reach, flanked on one side by a straw jacketed bottle of brandy, on the other by a box of cigars.

"Anything else, Captain?"

"No."

The cabin boy retired noiselessly. Left alone, Le Konnec dosed his coffee with brandy, lighted one of the slim cylinders of brown tobacco, leaned back in the chair and smiled. In another day, two at the most, he would see his wife and children, after an absence of almost four years. No need to consult chart or calendar to know it was spring and that the French coast was near. The sunlight, the very feel of the wind evoked thoughts of home.

Nearly fifty, Le Konnec was well preserved, vigorous, owning a good stomach and sound limbs. A strong chin, massive nose, clear blue eyes gave him a typical Breton mask, with the hint of ruthless stubbornness peculiar to the race. His father had been a farmer, but somewhere, sometime, there must have been sailors in the breed.

Yves had felt the lure of the sea, run away from home at ten, become a cabin boy on a fishing boat bound for the Banks.

From one ship to another, many years, until he found himself captain and owner. Because of this slow rise, he had married later than most men, when he had sensed that Jeanne was growing tired of waiting.

The four masted bark *La Jeanne* belonged almost entirely to him. A shipping firm headed by a personal friend kept an interest in her, but simply to supply him with connections abroad, contacts, agents. Since the outbreak of the war, Le Konnec had been lucky. Anything that would float was a valuable cargo carrier. He had sailed up and down both coasts of South America, and was going home at last, after calls at Fort de France, Martinique and Philadelphia, where he had picked up a mixed cargo for Europe.

His original crew had melted, as man after man answered the call and left to take his proper place in the navy or the army. These young men he had replaced with older men and mere boys, picked up here and there.

Somehow, today reminded him of his first return home. He looked down at the palms of his hands, grinned. No longer calloused, or sore and smarting from abrasions and brine. In his own way, he had achieved success. This life was better than life on a farm. The question asked by his father so long ago had been answered; he had done right to choose the sea. Today, also, his last worry vanished, the haunting fear of submarines. He was well within the patrolled zone, had sighted armed trawlers and a destroyer the preceding afternoon. Where there were so many dogs there could be no wolf.

Submarines. He shrugged, his eyes filled with amusement; he had heard nothing else for weeks. In Fort de France, he had been given a cannon to protect his ship, two old gunners to serve it. The gun, an old sixty-five millimeter on wheels, was lashed on the poop. A toy, which would have proved useless. The same was true of the wireless set, which never worked and was good only to procure an excuse for the presence aboard of a consumptive youth unfit for active service yet burning with patriotism.

Patriotism. Le Konnec laughed gently; the cigar was good, the brandy excellent. Naturally, at the beginning of the conflict, he had succumbed to the all prevailing fever, had cabled to offer his services. Even after being told that he would serve best aboard his own vessel, keeping commerce alive, he had fretted, until the first emotional reaction to the beating drums had waned.

Glory? The greatest glory was possessing a thick wallet. He rubbed his bristling gray hair with his hands, wondered whether his money grubbing instinct was inherited from tight fisted farmer forbears. He had never been reckless with money. Even looking back, he firmly believed that his savings were preferable to the wrecked stomachs and assorted ills that squandered wages had brought other sailors. Yet he had always been ashamed of his economical outlook, had envied the careless spender, the man who could toss away six months' pay in one gorgeous night and feel no remorse.

PIERRE LAVOIL, his first mate, a grizzled old fellow from the Channel coast, came into the cabin. He usually took his lunch at noon, two hours earlier than his commander, and came down below later to sip brandy and smoke.

"Everything all right?" Le Konnec asked perfunctorily.

"Yes, Captain—" Lavoil reached for the bottle. "If this wind keeps up, we'll be in St. Nazaire by ten tomorrow. No sign of submarines, though from what we were told you'd have thought them as thick as flies on honey."

"I did right not to pay that war insurance premium they asked me in Philadelphia," Le Konnec pointed out. "I knew we'd get through all right!"

"Sure." Lavoil smiled. "Your wife knows you're coming home, Captain?"

"Cabled her. She's probably been waiting in port a couple of days, with the kids."

"They'll have changed," Lavoil suggested, to make conversation. "The boy the most. From twelve to near sixteen counts. Must be almost a man—"

"My wife writes me—" Le Konnec interrupted himself, lifted his hand. "What's that yelling on deck?"

"Double wine ration—last day out," Lavoil hinted.

"Perhaps." Le Konnec nodded, sipped coffee.

A slapping of bare soles against oilcloth and the boy rushed in. His plump, round face, lighted by startled, agate-like eyes, was scarlet with excitement.

"Captain—the Second says there's a telescope in sight!"

"You mean a periscope," Le Konnec corrected mechanically, and rose.

"The Second should be in the Pope's navy," Lavoil grumbled, as he followed his chief.

The second mate was from the Mediterranean coast, hence no sailor to a northern man. He greeted his superiors with a nervous smile, lifted his hand to indicate the suspicious object.

Le Konnec nodded, whitening. A slender tube was visible, a half mile away, coming toward *La Jeanne*, the water parting on either side with little twirls of foam. A periscope, there could be no doubt.

"Don't get excited, boys," Le Konnec called out. "He won't waste a torpedo on us. Probably will send men aboard to put a bomb in the hold. We'll have a chance to evacuate the ship. Nothing to fear!" He broke off to address the gunners and the cabin boy, who were taking the canvas cover off the gun. "Leave that alone, you damned fools, this isn't a cruiser!"

Lavoil ran aft, shoved the gunners away from the piece, cuffed the cabin boy. Le Konnec approved with a nod. Even so slight a demonstration of resistance might irritate the Germans, not patient men by all reports.

He watched, as in a dream, the submarine emerge completely, a quarter of a mile away. That long, dark, metallic object, with its dumpy superstructure, its menacing gun, surmounted by the long stem of the periscope, seemed the materialization of a nightmare. It appeared to have an individuality of its own, malevolent, sinister, unreal, inhuman.

Le Konnec was almost happy when men issued forth from its belly. At the first warning shot, which fell well forward of *La Jeanne*, he lifted his hand.

"Back mainyards! Heave to!"

A creaking of spars, an immense rustling above, crackling slaps of canvas, and the crew stood about, looking expectantly at the captain. A few already edged toward the boats.

"No danger!" Le Konnec said again, confidently. "We've stopped. They won't waste ammunition. Be calm, lads!"

The submarine had launched a dinghy, rowed by four sailors. Two more sat in the stern, rifles on their knees, flanking an officer. Le Konnec ordered a ladder thrown down, and the three armed men climbed aboard. The leader was very young, nineteen or twenty, his face pale and drawn beneath the naval cap bearing the Imperial badge. A blue sweater molded his torso; ridiculously large boots encumbered his legs. He held a big automatic in his right hand.

"I wish to speak to the captain," he said in perfect French.

"I'M THE captain," Le Konnec replied, stepping forward.

The young man smiled, shifted his pistol to the left hand, brought the right to the peak of his cap politely.

"I regret we have frightened you. But

you are most fortunate, most fortunate!"

"How?"

Le Konnec spread his feet wide apart, gripped the cigar with his teeth. He believed, for an instant, that the young German was laughing at him, and he did not like it.

"You will not be sunk. We have a wounded officer aboard. Accident in the machinery—contusions of the chest, possible fracture of the skull. We must return to our base. Either by the northern route or through the Channel barrage, we shall be compelled to submerge for long periods. He could not possibly survive the trip. He is a gentleman of fine family, and we wish to do all we can. You shall take him ashore, surrender him to the authorities. In return, your vessel will be spared. I need not ask if you accept—"

"I accept," Le Konnec agreed readily. Strangely enough, a surge of liking for the youth swept him. Not a bad lad, polite, doing his job, and a nasty job. Life in the bowels of that iron whale could not be exhilarating.

"I must also requisition food and soap. Do you carry ammunition, guns?"

"That thing aft—" Le Konnec indicated the sixty-five. "Want me to throw it overboard?" He was vaguely desirous to prove his good intentions, his gratitude to fate.

"No—" the young man laughed. "It's very ornamental—a pity to destroy it! 1880 model, isn't it? But, to be serious, Captain—I must look at the ship's papers. Log, manifest, et cetera." He followed Le Konnec down into the big cabin. "No great hurry. Your patrol boats are far from here. Not due in this vicinity until sometime tomorrow. On escort duty elsewhere—"

"How do you know?" Le Konnec asked, nettled.

"Our business to know."

The German pushed the cap to the back of his head, laid the pistol on the table, lighted one of the cigars, puffed once or twice, then stuffed more in his pockets. The bottle drew his attention, and he poured himself a glass. Then he glanced over Le Konnec's log.

"Been to South America? I have an uncle in Brazil. Is Philadelphia a gay city?"

Le Konnec answered briefly, his anger rising. He was humiliated to see this young fellow making himself at home on his ship, in his cabin, without asking permission. The German threw the log and the bills of lading to the deck, unfolded the manifest.

"Well, what do they think of the war in America? Odds are still the same, for Russia's out." He puffed at the cigar, moved his free hand restlessly. "The war will last a year more—you'll be glad to get home. Long cruise, what? What's this? You have gasoline?"

"Yes, in cases, loaded in Philadelphia," Le Konnec admitted.

"Why didn't you say so? You must turn it over to us. We can use it!" The young officer became serious. "Bad luck for me, in a way. That'll keep us out longer, a week, ten days. Keep your position here, and the submarine will come alongside to take on the gasoline. Have the cases opened and the tins ready to pour out. Understood?"

"Perfectly, Lieutenant!" Le Konnec assented.

The color had returned to his face, and he swayed like a bear, fists sunk deep in his coat pockets. A queer smile was on his lips.

"Good!"

The German selected certain papers containing information which he thought would be of use to him, stuffed them inside the sweater. Then, briskly, he led the way to the deck.

The dinghy was laden with bundles of food, and she settled low as the two men bearing rifles boarded her. The officer glanced down, shook his head, spoke at length in his own language, and the rowers pulled away.

"I remain aboard, Captain, until the submarine comes."

"You're welcome," Le Konnec said, a hint of sarcasm in his voice. He waited until the dinghy was nearly at the submarine, then grasped the young lieutenant's shoulders. "Give me that gun!"

Le Konnec dodged lightly as a swinging fist sped by his chin. He crashed his hard knuckles full on the younger man's lips, knocking him down, bent swiftly, secured the automatic.

"Hoist all sails! Gunners to your stations!"

"Captain, Captain—" Lavoil protested.

The German had risen, ran to the rail and leaped overboard. A moment later, he was seen again, swimming toward his ship. Le Konnec lifted the pistol, muttered, and lowered his arm.

After a first stillness of utter surprise, the crew sprung to its work. *La Jeanne* gathered speed as the wind filled her sails. Pitiful speed, compared to the fifteen knots surface speed of her modern foe. The improvised gun crew gathered around the tiny cannon, waiting for the ship to swing before opening fire.

"We'll be butchered, Captain," Lavoil said calmly.

"They know we have gasoline on board."

Le Konnec lighted another cigar, blinked his eyes rapidly, as if to dispel his own doubts.

"With it, that tin thing can keep at sea a few days longer. There may be convoys north of here, near Brest. Or south, near Bordeaux. Let them go back to their base in Belgium, or, down off the Spanish coast to one of the supply ships we heard about, to refuel."

"We can pour the stuff overboard, then surrender, Captain."

"They'd massacre us anyway, after this."

"But we'd be sure they wouldn't get it," Lavoil insisted.

"No." Konnec laughed quietly. "There are no patrol boats around; they'll try to capture the stuff. Otherwise, they might get sore enough to waste a torpedo and blow us to the devil. How many rifles have we?"

"Three military rifles and a shotgun, Captain."

"Pick out good shots, give them the weapons. That tub is so constructed that they must come from cover one at a time, and we can make that unpleasant, keep them from boarding. We'll have to stand their shelling, dodge them until night—" Le Konnec broke off to shout orders.

A deep detonation near by. *La Jeanne* had presented its stern to the enemy, and the sixty-five had fired its first round. Alert, eager, the crew reloaded. The sun was hot and the wind moderate.

ASTONISHING things may be done with a four masted bark handled by a captain counting forty years at sea, with the blood of Breton privateers in his veins. Astonishing things may be expected of a crew whose pride has been swollen out of all reason at finding itself coping with a naval unit superior in speed and armament. The wind was moderate, the sun warm.

And with that moderate wind, under that warm sun, Le Konnec played his game. Baffling twists and turns, long tacks ending abruptly, last minute swerves that shunted the vessel's single little cannon out of vision. Not dangerous in itself, that gun, save in case of a lucky hit, but extremely annoying. Even a slightly crippled submarine off the French shore was a lost submarine.

On the steel craft was a young commander, under thirty, who did not understand what was occurring. He felt like a tiger trying to crush against the floor of its cage a little, glittering ball of quicksilver.

There was gasoline on that bark with the letters *La Jeanne* inscribed across her stern, neatly plated with goldleaf. Gasoline meant greater service to his country, a decoration, perhaps his name in the newspapers, fame equal to that of a crack aviator. The German navy was new, hence the young commander did not know what an American, British, French officer would have guessed easily. He was merely a seaman dealing with a born sailor.

At irregular intervals, the sixty-five millimeter gun would send its little shell, which invariably fell short, as the submarine had withdrawn out of its range. Occasionally the German's one-hundred-and-fifty-five hurled a projectile at the sailing vessel, but in this also caution must be used. Bigger game might be encountered later, steamships, and a submarine has no shells to waste. A torpedo against a bark, that could not be thought of. Moreover, the submarine commander had his share of stubbornness, and wished to get the gasoline, the blood of undersea crafts.

At last a shell whipped the sixty-five millimeter loose from its moorings, tumbled it into the sea.

The two gunners and one assistant went with the old weapon. The cabin boy picked himself up in the waist of the ship, where the explosion had tossed him. He reeled dazedly, blood dripping down his face, a grin on his lips.

Le Konnec lighted another cigar.

The deck was littered with wounded men. Two boats had been knocked to kindlings. The main topgallant mast was overboard; men were aloft, cutting off the wreckage in true privateer style. The chips were falling everywhere, with fragments of spars, rags of canvas, lengths of rope. Men were working the pump, others formed a chain of buckets to put out fires. A strong smell of hot tar, of sulphur, of smoldering wood and blazing paint, shot through and mingled with the stale odor of blood. The deck was half a junk heap and half an abattoir. Lavoil was plucking splinters of wood from the wireless telegraphist's back, into which they had been driven like a flight of arrows by a bursting shell.

"Keep the wounded on deck, ready to lower into the boats," Le Konnec warned.

He did not forget his duty to these men, who were doing more than their duty. Strangely keen, his brain seemed to have split into two parts, one which considered the past, one which thought of the present. He gave his orders to suit new developments, without ceasing to review his life. Not a bad life, and not a bad way to end it. Le Konnec was not without conceit, and was pleased to have held out so long.

"The slobs have seen our gun going off," Lavoil called out. "They're coming nearer!"

"They want to board us, maybe," Le Konnec declared. "You lads with the rifles, watch out. Pick them off as soon as they're within range."

He held the big automatic taken from the German, weighed it thoughtfully, then, with a grin, presented it to the cabin boy.

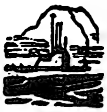
"Here—that'll carry nearly as far as a rifle. Don't waste shots."

The lad ran to the rail, peered toward the enemy. He had rolled his shirt like a turban around his head, to stop the flow of blood. His thin, pink, lightly muscled torso rose above the baggy trousers, fragile, graceful. Poor little devil, Le Konnec thought. He did not realize what one lost when one lost life. Of the men aboard, he was probably the only one who sincerely enjoyed the show.

Le Konnec glanced at his watch. The combat had been on ninety minutes.

He dared tack no longer, fearing that the stays had weakened dangerously after the fall of the mast. He must circle, breaking the wind on the other tack from aft.

"'Ware ship," he cried. "Pass your lazy-tacks over—stand by crossjack braces!"



THE SUBMARINE altered her course to follow *La Jeanne*, came within one hundred and fifty yards. Then the rifles popped, dry, insignificant detonations after the recent din. The boy rested his left elbow on the rail to brace his right wrist, fired two shots. A booted figure on the deck of the steel craft bent over, knelt.

"That's the stuff, lads!" Le Konnec complimented.

But he knew that such luck could not hold out forever. Men with rifles were on the deck of the submarine, sniping. Le Konnec knew he was hit, somewhere between the right elbow and the shoulder. His arm hung limply, warm liquid reached his fingers.

"Leave the pumps, lads. Bring up those cases and spill the gasoline!"

Hammers and axes pounded away. Cans were ripped open. The gasoline spread a shimmering, silken film on the water. Lavoil stood by, checking off each case of two cans as it was disposed of, on a copy of the manifest. The job finished, the cases were thrown overboard, in plain sight of the submarine.

The result was not long awaited. One, two, three shells struck *La Jeanne,* placed as with the hand, near the waterline, one aft, one forward, the last amidship. The bark quivered. The deck sloped. All unfastened objects rolled to starboard. Le Konnec left Lavoil in charge, ran down to the cabin to fetch the ship's papers.

"Lavoil! Make sure who's dead and who's not! Quartermaster, lower boat No. 3," he cried, coming back.

The boat had to be lowered in full sight of the enemy. The wounded were eased down into it one by one. This transfer offered good targets for the German marksmen. Lavoil shook his fist angrily, but Le Konnec lifted his shoulders. They were in the right, those fellows; he and his crew had cost them enough to deserve no pity. Again he consulted his watch: the combat had lasted two hours. Not bad, with wood against steel, sail against motor, old against new.

La Jeanne lurched sickeningly, sank deeper. But she floated, flanked by the boatload of bleeding men. She had settled so much that one might almost step into the boat at one stride.

"Everybody off," Le Konnec snapped. "Lavoil! Take charge. Those lubbers couldn't make the shore alone. Here, take the papers. And—that's all."

Lavoil opened his lips to protest. But he had never questioned an order in his life. He hopped into the boat, the oars were unshipped. Le Konnec saw that the men armed with rifles were still near.

"Go on, *mes gars,* get in there so they can shove off."

"What about you, Captain?"

"I'll stay. They'd ram the boat if I went along. They may not bother you if I stay. It's me they're after now."

"We stick, Captain."

Le Konnec looked at the speaker a minute, saw it was useless to argue. He took the pistol from the cabin boy and sent him to join Lavoil. The boat drew away, sliding along the flank of *La Jeanne,* turned around her bow, placing the bark between herself and the submarine. And Le Konnec was left alone with the men who had rifles.

How long would the bark float? Hard to tell. Ships were queer that way. In this calm sea, she might last an hour, two, a day, or might turn over within five minutes. Le Konnec went aft to take the wheel.

He steered straight for France. Mechanically, without hope. The submarine was circling *La Jeanne,* at a respectful distance. Then she disappeared, sliding beneath the water like a diving porpoise.

Already far to the east, the boat was floating. Lavoil was waiting there for the last episode, unwilling to abandon his chief. Le Konnec felt very calm. He had no regrets and no hopes. He knew that to recall the boat meant to doom all within her. He should not do that; that would not be economical. He smiled.

"Captain," remarked one of those left with him, "a smoke on the southeast!"

LE KONNEC was bewildered and a little drunk.

The dinner which had followed the ceremony of decoration had been copiously drenched with wines. He was at the Port Office, awaiting the automobile granted him by the authorities to take him and his family home. His wife—she was subtly changed, a little grayer, a little more wrinkled—fingered his sleeve nervously. His daughter, a large, shy girl of nineteen, was flushing while listening to a youthful ensign.

And his son, almost sixteen, was a big boy, large of hands and feet, his face already tanned, his collar leaving a red mark on his neck. He had the same good chin, the massive nose and the identical stubborn forehead of his father.

"As I've been telling mamma, I don't want the law—" he repeated.

"Do as you like. It's your own life," Le Konnec agreed placidly. "Jeanne, leave him alone."

"He'll pass his examinations next year for his *bachot*," Jeanne protested. "And he has a chance to make something of himself. Something more than a sailor."

"What if he doesn't like it?" Le Konnec wondered. He scratched a match on the wall to light his cigar. "Is that auto never coming? Wish we had taken the train. I'm tired and want to get home."

"What a joke—you want to get home ten minutes sooner, after four years," Jeanne said.

Then she smiled, her eyes beamed, and she half rose with an alert, respectful expression.

A man had just entered, a general in horizon blue, studded with plaques, crosses and medals. The same man who had that day pinned the Legion of Honor and the *Croix de Guerre* on Le Konnec's coat "for the most gallant sea fight in the annals of this war. A good Frenchman and a true Breton . . ."

The general came over to the Le Konnec group briskly, bowed to Madame and Mademoiselle Le Konnec and faced the young lad. "Yours, Captain?"

"Yes, General."

The man with the stars on his sleeves twisted his white mustache, pursed his fleshy lips.

"What are you going to do in life, my boy?"

"I'll be a sailor, if I'm left alone," Le Konnec junior replied. "They want to make me a lawyer, *mon general.*"

"Nonsense! Madame, you would make a scribe of the son of such a father! Come, be reasonable!"

"I promise to be, General," Madame Le Konnec agreed, abashed by the brusk, military tone.

"Fine! Fine! Now, my boy, write me when you're ready to pass examination for *Le Borda*. I'll help you enter the navy, I promise you."

"Thank you, *mon general.*" The boy flushed, but stubbornly voiced his conviction. "I don't want to enter the navy, though. I'll go into the merchant service."

"Bah! And why?"

"The navy—well, *mon general*, there's a lot of gold braid in it, but precious little money!"

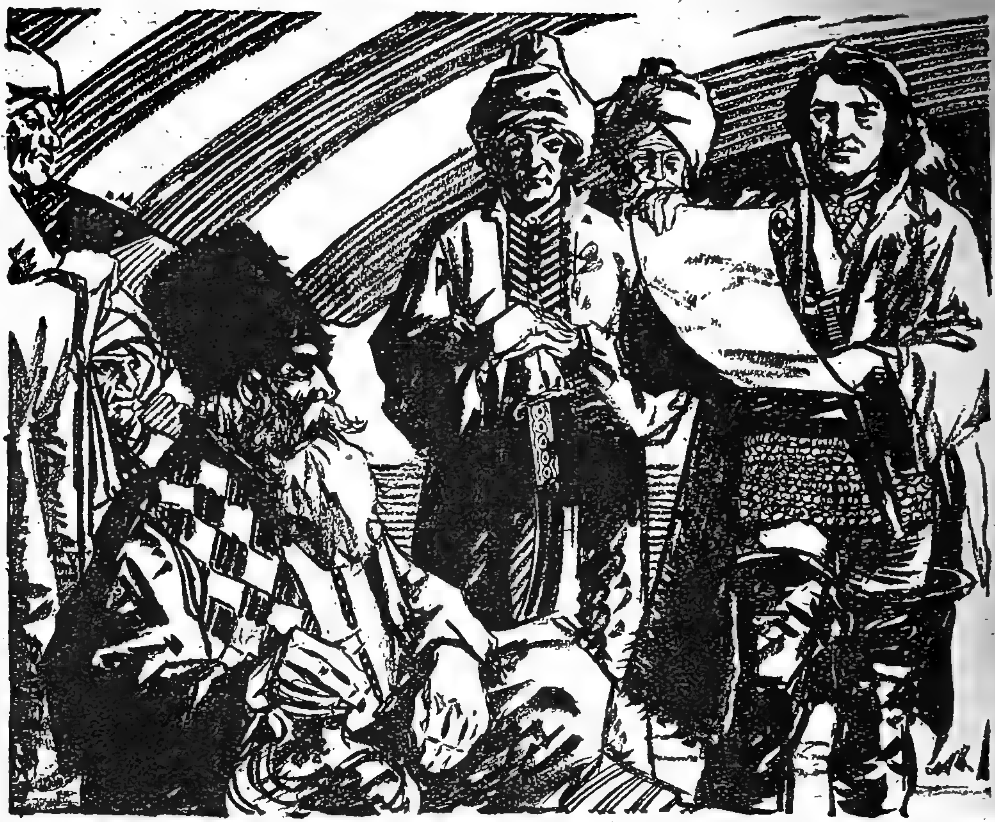
"Ah!" the general said deeply. "Ah!" He coughed, sought for words, then gave up, with an expression of evident shock on his pink face.

Le Konnec thought it time to intervene.

"The fruit never falls far from the tree, General," he explained. "That lad is like myself—a materialist."

"Yves," his wife remarked, much later, as the limousine whirled them through the country, "you must have said something stupid, for the general laughed at you."

"I should worry what he thinks!" Le Konnec retorted, without looking up from the papers he was consulting, figures dancing in his head. "I told him the truth!"



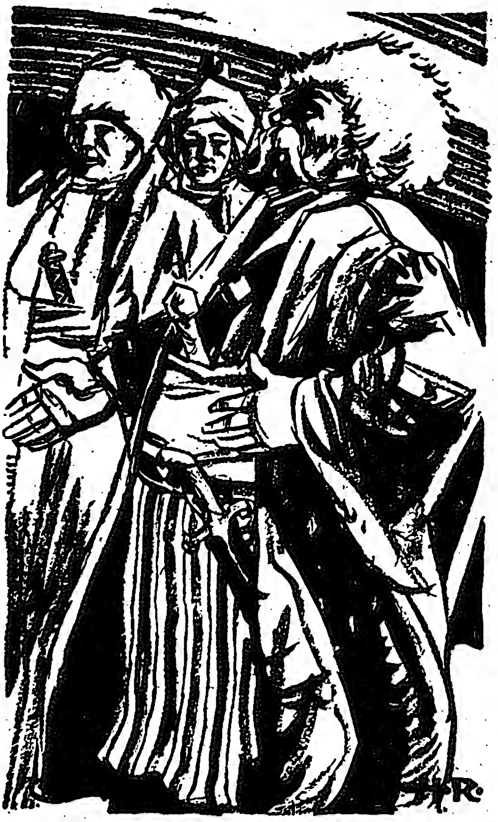
Concluding

THE OUTRIDER

By HAROLD LAMB

IN THE middle of the Seventeenth Century, Poland, which was Christian, was hard set to defend herself from the raids of the Tartars and Turks to the south and east of her. Only if the Khan of the Krim—Crimea—could be persuaded not to unite his wild hordes with the Turks against Poland, could Poland be saved. No Christian, sent to negotiate with the Khan of the Krim, had ever returned. But King Sigismund of Poland was desperate. He dispatched a diplomatic mission—with Prince Paul and the chancellor at its head—to visit the powerful Khan.

It was not unusual in those days for thrifty young Scotsmen to hire themselves to the rich armies of Eastern Europe; and thus it happened that Duncan Stuart, a colonel at twenty-eight, was the officer in



A Two-Part Novel of the Khan of the Krim and his great Tartar Horde

charge of the escort of the ambassadors.

Ayub, the old Cossack of the Don, who had attached himself to Stuart at Kudak on the Dnieper, was the scout. Ayub rode ahead.

It was winter. The chancellor and Prince Paul traveled by sledge, with provisions, while the guards rode their horses through the deep snow. When the party reached a deserted village all of the Tartars in Stuart's force—who were supposed to be friendly—deserted. The next day the ambassadors were attacked by wild Nogai tribesmen. Two nobles and forty-two Christians, hussars and town Cossacks, were slain. Only Stuart and Ayub, being well mounted and extraordinary horsemen, survived.

It was little consolation to have escaped the tribesmen, in a strange snow-bound country, in the middle of a winter night. They spurred their horses, to get out of sight of the Nogais by dawn. They were honor bound to proceed—to the Krim.

"Do you see any escape, Little Father?" asked old Ayub.

"Not I," said Stuart, and laughed, for he was still young.

Through the darkness Nogai shouts came down the cold wind.

CHAPTER V

ENEMY'S SHELTER

STUART, on the fresher horse, had taken the lead. The Cossack's big charger had been trotting through snow for the greater part of a day and the half of a night, and its strength was failing. It stumbled frequently, pulling up with a snort and a quick heaving of flanks. If the two men had been mounted on ordinary cavalry beasts they would have been overtaken by the ponies of the Nogais before now. From time to time Ayub glanced over his shoulder, trying to pierce the pitlike gloom. The tribesmen, he knew, would not loose their arrows until they were certain of striking down the men without injuring the horses. They were too wise to scatter in pursuit, and they would not give the fugitives a chance to use their swords. The Cossack and the officer had a pistol each, but in the darkness they were worse than useless—the flash would reveal them to their adversaries and the dense smoke would hide the ensuing rush of the tribesmen. Ayub had seen the

Nogais charge the Poles through such smoke.

The piebald wolf chaser neighed suddenly, and then again, thrusting down its head.

"That is a good omen, Little Father," the Cossack called.

He stared around him, then down at the ground. Bending over, he looked again, and jumped off without slowing up the black horse. Rein in hand he ran beside it for awhile. Then, gripping the saddle horn, the rein over his arm, he swung himself up again, grunting with the effort.

"Turn to the right, Little Father," he urged, and Stuart obeyed in silence.

After a few minutes, his eyes still bent on the snow, the Cossack spoke again.

"Now to the left a little."

"What is it?" Stuart asked.

"Many horse tracks, all around. A whole herd—wild, maybe, or a Tartar's herd. By day I could know."

"Will yonder devils lose our tracks here?"

"Nay, they will not lose the trail. But they will have to dismount and stick their snouts down, and so they will fall behind."

Ayub uttered an exclamation and turned his head. For some time the air had been growing colder; now it seemed warmer, and the black sky lighter. Something stung his face and beat against his eyes.

"Faith," Stuart said, "nothing is wanted. We are already marked for dead men, and here is the snow to bury us."

The snow was dry and hard, and it whirled around them, shutting them in so that soon they could not see beyond their horses' heads. And presently it rose from the ground, swirling around them.

"Eh," the Cossack observed, "the Nogais won't look for us any more. They'll ride for shelter, if they know any place near; if not, they'll let the horses pick the way." He pondered for a moment. "Drop the rein, Little Father; urge on the spotted horse, and let him lead. That's the best thing to do."

The two horses drew together until the stirrups rubbed, and the piebald seemed to turn down the wind, after Stuart tossed the rein on his neck. But he trotted slowly and then fell of his own accord into a walk.

So far the cold had not troubled the men, but now the icy breath of the storm chilled their backs. Stuart dismounted and walked for a while, to stir the blood in his numbed feet.

"Don't do that, Sir Colonel," the Cossack remarked. "If you walk, the horse will follow you. If he is left to himself he'll go to a wood, or perhaps a ravine, and then we may be able to gather a fire."

There was no sign of any break in the plain. At times they went down long slopes, or circled around a knoll, but the dense veil of drifting snow made it seem as if they were still walking over the level steppe. Both of them knew what the storm meant—the cold steadily increasing until morning. By then the horses would be exhausted. And the wind came in such gusts that they could not tell whether they were wandering in a circle or not.

Once or twice the piebald wolf chaser lifted his head and pricked his ears. Finally he whinnied, and Ayub grunted with satisfaction. The horse had heard or scented something.

"*Ahai muslimin*—" a wailing voice pierced the silence. "Ho, ye believers!"

And from the other side of them a second voice made response—

"Is it thou, Ismail?"

Leather creaked faintly near at hand and was echoed by a jangling of iron. Ayub and Stuart reined in and waited. They could see nothing in the drifting veil of white.

"Do not wander!"

A shout came from farther off, and then the silence remained unbroken. Ayub crossed himself on breast and forehead.

"Lost souls—spirits seeking for shelter," he muttered, "or those dog born dogs of Nogais."

He noticed that the piebald went forward again more swiftly, and he wondered whether the charger were following the horses of the tribesmen. Then the cold crept into his limbs; the ache of hunger settled in his body. The best thing, he thought, was to let the horse go on.

When his bones pained him, and the cold settled in his old hurts, his thoughts turned to the tavern of Kudak and the delight of hot brandy.

"*Tfu,*" he told himself, "all that fine wine of the *tabor* is being guzzled by these sons of Satan, and I did not even fill a flask. They'll find gold enough to cover their wives with necklaces, and not a ducat in my pouch. Devil fly away with them!"

The sky seemed lighter, and the snow had moderated. But it was not morning, because a silvery half light filled the air. The clouds had broken away and the glow of the old moon had penetrated to the plain. By this dim radiance, through the thin veil of the storm, he saw that Stuart rode crouched in his saddle, his shoulders bent. The snow had drifted against the crupper and the officer's back, and had coated one side of the spotted horse. Stuart's cloth greatcoat was less protection than the sheepskin lined *svitka* and the massive flesh of the Cossack.

"Eh," Ayub thought, "the lad is suffering, but he does not curse or berate me."

He drew up to the Scot, when the piebald horse turned sharply to one side and quickened its pace. Ahead of it something high and dark took shape through the drift—something shaped like a dome, coated white on one side.

Beside it the piebald halted, and Stuart laughed hoarsely.

"A haystack!"

AYUB tumbled out of his saddle and ran to the horses' heads, gripping their muzzles as well as he could in his numbed hands.

"Please to dismount, Little Father," he whispered. "Take the horses and don't let them whinny. Perhaps there is a hut near this stack. The men out here don't leave their hay in pastures."

While Stuart climbed down stiffly, Ayub swung his arms and beat his fists together until he could move his fingers. Then he disappeared into the gloom.

The Scot had his hands full with the horses, which were snorting and pushing up to the stack, and when he quieted them he heard Ayub's high pitched call.

"A-a-ay, Little Father. This wa-ay!"

Leading the horses, Stuart walked toward the sound, and made out what seemed to be a smaller haystack before him. It was a domed *yurt,* like the one he had lost, but with a rough shed and corral of twisted branches built against its protected side. He went around it until he reached the entrance flap. Ayub's voice came from within.

Looking under the lifted felt, he saw the big Cossack, sword in hand, shaking the snow off his *svitka.* The light came from the glowing embers of a fire in the sunken stone hearth beneath the central opening of the tent. The earth was covered with greasy carpets, and the place reeked of smoke and sour milk and leather. On the divan at the side crouched an old man who wore a stiff leather jacket with a horse's mane hanging from the shoulders—his shaven head covered by a green skullcap, and from under it his black eyes stared at the intruders without expression. A broad faced, handsome girl was hanging a pot over the embers and putting on fresh dried dung from a pile in one corner.

"Nogais," Ayub said. "Warm yourself, Little Father, and don't let them run out, while I look around. That young lioness is heating up broth."

In the half hour that he was gone the two Tartars said not one word. The girl built up the fire until the mutton broth steamed, and from time to time when her back was to the old man, she stared intently at Stuart out of her slanting eyes. Her head was bound in a neat white kerchief, and her shoulders were weighted by strings of pierced silver coins of all kinds. Ayub came in with a gust of snow.

"Satan still has us in charge," he grunted. "Other *yurts* are near. I saw some tracks going toward them. Those dogs we heard yelping out yonder must have come in ahead of us, and our nags followed them. But this storm's a regular *buran*, and they won't stir out of their nests for awhile."

"Is this a Nogai village?"

"That's what it is." The Cossack went over to look at the woman's cupboard, where cheese cakes were hung in a leather bag, beside heavier sacks. "Mare's milk; *kumiss*, they call it," he explained, prodding a sack. He sniffed at a heavy clay jug. "*Gorailka!* Eh, thou grandfather, offer a greeting to thy guests!" He tipped up the jug and took several long swallows. "*Allah kirbadiz partalouk!* Allah protect your shadow!"

The old Nogai spat out one word.

"*Kaphar!*"

Silently the girl brought out two porcelain bowls and filled them with broth, setting the cheese cakes between her unbidden guests. Ayub handed the jug to the officer.

The fiery spirits and the hot broth warmed them, and the Nogai woman filled the Cossack's bowl three times before setting the pot aside to cool. Stuart could eat but little, but the heat of the *yurt* brought on a drowsiness that he could not shake off.

"Stretch out and sleep," Ayub advised him. "I'll smoke my pipe and talk to the grandfather and his bride. I'll wake you after dawn."

Stuart loosened his belt, but kept his boots on, and he placed his sword and pistol by his right hand. Lying on the carpet of the divan, he watched Ayub light his clay pipe with an ember. The reek of the Cossack's tobacco mingled with the burning dung, and smoke eddied under the blackened dome of the *yurt*. But before the young officer's eyes passed the vista of the fight in the steppe—the winged hussars engulfed in the gray horse—the blood streaked beard of the chancellor—Chort, kneeling with an arrow in his throat. And the wind buffeted the heavy folds of the felt near his head, as if the storm itself were striking at him.

◆

ALL THE next day the storm raged. The cold increased, until the small fire failed to warm the wind swept *yurt*, and Ayub departed without explaining to Stuart why he went. The Scot heard him moving about in the corral, and at intervals a loud thump sounded. When at last he appeared he carried an armful of wood, and explained that he had found a supply near some distant *yurts*. He had seen no Tartars, said they were all holed up like foxes.

Ayub had been tipping up the jug and helping out the *gorailka* with the fermented mare's milk. This combination made him restless and cheerful. When he had a roaring fire going, he went out again and returned with the frozen leg of a lamb on his shoulder.

"Nogais always hang them up, out of reach of the gray brothers."

The eyes of the old tribesman kindled for the first time when he saw so much meat, ready to be eaten without payment. It was a fat leg and tied to it was the massive tail of the sheep, with a half dozen pounds of fat in it. This was the prized portion of the sheep, and the Nogai gorged himself, when his visitors passed over the tail for the leaner meat, upon the greasy fat, until his leather jacket swelled visibly. Even when he belched he went on stuffing. Probably not for years had he tasted this delicacy, reserved for the distinguished or the richer men of the clan. He ate it all, and his girl wife dined after him on the broth.

When they had finished, Ayub filled two leather sacks with the mutton stew and took them outside to freeze. For the third time he vanished. The old Nogai was asleep after his debauch, and the girl was sitting quietly by the fire watching the officer. They had not been harmed, and they accepted the visitors with the fatalism of their race, taking pains to hide their curiosity.

The light was failing, and Stuart went to the entrance to watch for the Cossack, half minded to truss up his hosts and go and look for Ayub, even though nothing was visible ten yards away.

But the big warrior showed up again, this time with a low *kibitka* in tow—a small cart on runners, the wheels removed. He lugged this up to the corral and swaggered into the *yurt*.

"We are ready for the road now, Little Father." He grinned. "I found the sled over in the village, and brought it out myself. We'll load the wood into the *kibitka*, with the sacks of mutton and some hay. Then, when the storm is over, before the first light, we'll harness up two of old grandfather's nags and saddle our horses and go before these devils in sheepskins are stirring."

"What about the two Tartars?"

"We'll take them, too. They'll sell for ten ducats in Kudak. Now, if we had some fresh *gorailka*—"

He glanced longingly back into the drifting snow, but Stuart spoke to him sharply.

"Ayub, is your head clear?"

"Ay, Sir Colonel!"

"Then stay here with these two. I'm going to look at the horses." At the entrance he paused to ask another question. "If the storm lasts tonight, and stops tomorrow, in daylight—what then?"

The Cossack pondered, swaying a little as he warmed his shoulders at the fire.

"We'll have to trust to the horses again, ride like the devil."

Before the twilight ended Stuart inspected the commandeered sled and satisfied himself that the harness hanging in the Nogai's shed was sound. Then he busied himself loading the wood Ayub had confiscated into the *kibitka*, with the sacks of mutton. With a handful of hay he rubbed down the horses. This done, he made sure that the saddles were hanging on their pegs and that the chargers were well covered with felt blankets.

He knew that they had a chance to escape if the snow stopped before daylight, but if not—if the Nogais saw them riding off their chance was gone. Even if they could throw the warriors off their track by some miracle they could not cross the open plain without supplies. Strangely enough, Ayub, who had been moody before there was any danger, was now heedless of what might happen. The jug, no doubt, kept him from worrying; but the nearness of his old enemies, and the fight in the steppe, had stirred his blood. Stuart had taken stock of the situation and had weighed their chances with the care of a man who is not disturbed by danger. That night he told Ayub that he would watch, and the Cossack was soon snoring on the divan across the fire from the Tartars.

From time to time the girl, as if accustomed to do so, woke and put more wood on the fire. Once, after listening to the snores of her aged master, she came close to the officer and smiled at him shyly.

"*Kaphar!*" she whispered, but the word was approval rather than reproach.

The fire flickered up and by its light Stuart saw that the Nogai bride had not been idle during the last day. To the silver coins in her necklaces she had added two new gold pieces. And he wondered if in any way they had come from the treasure carried by the *tabor*. They were bright pieces of irregular shape, badly minted, and she glanced down at them proudly. He lifted one from her breast and inspected it. The inscription was Turkish—a sultan's seal.

"Othman?" he asked, and she nodded vigorously.

They had not come from the treasure of the Poles, but Stuart reflected that this girl could not have had them long. She seemed to value them immensely, and he did not understand why she had chosen to add them to her ornaments just then. She pointed at the snoring old man and held up three fingers. Evidently the Nogai had three similar coins. After a moment's thought, Stuart went to the divan and shook Ayub's knee.

The Cossack sprang up, his hand groping for his sword, and the girl would have fled had not Stuart caught her wrist.

"Ask her where the Turkish pieces came from. Nay, do not take them."

Ayub listened, his head bent down to the girl's white kerchief while she whispered rapidly.

"A man called Abd-al-Rahman brought much money, like this," he explained, "in the last moon. He gave with an open hand, and he rode a white Arabian horse, with a green saddle cloth, and he wore Tartar garments. But he came from Stamboul, the city of the Sultan, to give the Tartars money."

"The man who carried the chancellor's head to the *tabor* rode a white Arabian with a green saddle cloth, and he was richly dressed."

"Ahmak noticed that," the Cossack assented. "The girl said he gave the money because the great Sultan loves the Tartars, and so Abd-al-Rahman went with them to raid the Christians."

Stuart nodded. The Turks, then, were sending gold to the tribes even in winter, and officers to lead them on raids. If they did that with the Nogais they would surely have envoys in the court of the Krim Khan.

"Does the Nogai chieftain serve the Khan of the Krim?" he asked, and Ayub pondered.

"Well, they fight over cattle, Little Father, and they have more feuds than a dog has fleas, but the Nogais go to war under the Khan's standard."

He stared at Stuart and at the jug, wondering what had got into his officer. But the Scot, frowning, went to the entrance and looked out. Suddenly he swung around, shaking back the dark locks from his face, his gray eyes alight.

"Faith, Ayub, an omen. The stars are out!"

The Cossack ran to look for himself and then hastened to kick the old Nogai and pull on his gloves.

"*Na kon*—to horse."

THE WIND had not died down, and the cold was like flame touching their faces. Except to the south the sky was clear, and they harnessed the Tartar's ponies to the sled without delay, loading it up with bundles of hay. Among these bundles Ayub stowed the old man and the girl, wrapped in sheepskin robes. They made no effort to escape—in fact helped with the loading, since they had not expected that their lives would be spared.

Ayub saddled the two chargers, swearing under his breath when his fingers touched any metal. When he took the rein of the leading pony Stuart rode up to him.

"Make the Tartars show the road, or we will not get through the drifts." And when the Cossack would have started off, he checked him. "Nay, this way."

"But that is the south, Little Father, the way toward the sea."

"Aye."

"Down there is the Krim Khan and his city. The outposts can not be more than three days' ride."

"Aye, we are going to the Khan."

Slowly Ayub shook his head.

"How, going? The ambassadors have turned up their toes—the gold is gone. Why should we go?"

"It is the order of the king. The others are slain, but we are free to go."

The Cossack swung his short whip in silence for a moment.

"Impossible to go on! The Krim warriors would make saddles out of the hides of unbelievers, unless they are ambassadors. And ambassadors always have papers and servants, and they make lying speeches. We can't do all that."

Stuart fumbled with a gloved hand under his coat and drew out a sheet of parchment that had been rolled and creased. When Ayub bent to peer at it in the starlight he saw closely written lines, and at the bottom a seal.

"That is from the hand of the king," Stuart explained, "and the order he gave me was to reach the court of the Khan, at all costs."

Again the Cossack shook his head.

"Easier to keep a wolf out of sheep, than the Krim Tartars out of a war. Nay, 'tis not to be done."

Stuart put away the paper.

"In Kudak you said that two riders might get through where the detachment of Poles could not go. But I do not order you to go. Give me a horse and some food, and I will go on."

"May the devil take the king and all the Poles!" the Cossack groaned. "Impossible to abandon a comrade. You could not talk to the Krim, and they would take your head to put on a gate-post." He shook his own head gravely. "Little Father, I have seen men rush to embrace Death as if into the arms of a fair young woman, but I have never seen a man turn his rein toward the court of Satan."

Still muttering, he turned the head of the lead horse, and the sled creaked over the snow, past the distant black *yurts* of the Nogai encampment.

CHAPTER VI

THE TURKS

FOUR days later they heard the roar of the sea. It was near sunset, although no sun could be seen. Mist rolled in from the water, among black outcroppings of rock; the snow lay only in pockets and in the steep gullies under waving brush. The ground reeked of mud and salt and damp, and the tired horses floundered over slush and stones. The clamor of waterfowl filled the mist. The air, after the icy breath of the steppes, seemed hot.

They followed the narrow road that led along the shore, by fishing villages and shallow bays, until the throbbing of the surf diminished and the path led them beside what seemed to be a canal. Sometimes this strip of water narrowed until a horse almost could have leaped it, and at times it widened into reed bordered lakes where herons passed silently overhead. The mist thinned away by degrees, and the outline of the land loomed dark against the gray sky.

The canal became straighter, its banks high and sheer. And on the far side uprose the level line of a wall. No human beings were visible on the wall and, although Ayub listened for the tramp of horses, nothing could be heard moving. The old Tartar—Stuart had sent back the pair to their village with the sled when the road to the sea had been reached—had said that after they came out on the shore a ride of three hours would bring them to the gate of the Krim men. The deserted canal seemed to be the sea moat, but no gate was visible until darkness set in and the Cossack pointed out a glimmer of light ahead of them.

As they drew nearer the glimmer became brighter. Moving lights took shape, and the glow of fires. They heard a murmur of voices and the stir of animals.

On their side of the canal a street of sorts stretched to the moat—twin lines of mud and thatch buildings that seemed to house the offspring of bedlam. Around the fires men of all races were visible. Ayub saw the thin faces and the ragged caftans of Jews clustered among the muddy sheepskins of herders, and the striped cloaks of bearded Persians who snarled at all the rest.

Dogs and children wandered between the fires. A Circassian horseman trotted down the street, singing a high pitched love song. The air smelled of horses and dung, and the love song was blended with the whistling and bubbling of camels. Here and there the broken stone wall of a caravan *serai* took shape by the fires, with covered carts and lines of rough coated ponies beyond.

All of the men except the Jews were armed, but the Cossack noticed that no guards had been posted. At the end of the street the fires gleamed in the water of the moat and revealed the shadowy outline of the crenelated wall on the far side. A narrow bridge ran across the moat to the gate of a dark building on the other side. Little could be seen of this, except two slender towers that might have been watch towers or the minarets of a mosque.

Ayub stared up at it, fingering his beard.

"Eh, Little Father, the gate is closed. See, the caravans have taken to shelter for the night. In the morning, perhaps, they will go in."

"We will go in tonight."

They had no more food, the horses were nearly done. To beg quarters from the rabble of the *serais* would be to earn mockery and to lessen their dignity in the eyes of the throng. To sleep in their cloaks in the muddy field would be little better.

The Cossack nodded slowly.

"Aye, so. Shall we ride in among the dogs and send a message to the gate?"

"Nay, we will ride to the bridge. Is the envoy of a king to dismount among herders?"

He pulled up the head of the piebald charger and trotted forward, Ayub following a little to one side. The Cossack tightened his girdle and drew off his right glove, trying the blade of his *yataghan* to see if it were free in the sheath. Once within the light of the fires they could not turn back, and there was no guessing how the Moslems would greet them.

But they entered the head of the street unnoticed, and trotted between the buildings, amid a snarling of dogs, until a boy's shrill cry drew attention to them.

"*Giaours!*"

Then silence fell about the nearest fires. Men rose hastily to stare and to finger their beards in utter amazement. They seemed not to believe their eyes. They would have expected to see the companions of the Prophet himself ride armed among them, more readily than two Christians emerging from the steppe at night, unheralded and palpably without escort. Few of them had ever seen a man like Stuart before, and dark eyes fastened hungrily upon his gray cloak and stained red boots.

He did not turn his head, and he was halfway down the street when a clamor of excited comment uprose. Then, when it was evident that he would keep on to the bridge, men jostled to hasten after him and the dogs scurried ahead. Swordsmen swung into the saddles of waiting horses and cantered through the herders and slaves who raced afoot. Some snatched up torches and beat a way for themselves.

STUART and the Cossack reined in and walked their chargers out on the bridge because it was built of timbers laid loose across the beams, and a gap might have been left for the unwary. But the torches of their escort gave them light, although the throng halted and spread itself expectantly about the end of the bridge.

From over their heads came a harsh challenge, and when Stuart kept on without heading it, an arrow thudded into the boards by the forefeet of his horse. Ayub looked up at the towers, lifting his arm.

"*Elchi!*" he shouted. "An ambassador! O ye men of Krim, send word to the gate."

A second arrow flashed down, and the Cossack's charger snorted. Voices gibed and mocked from the crowd that jostled beyond the bridge, but the towers were silent. The glow of the torches revealed the face of the fortress clearly—a seemingly solid wall of blackened brick and the lofty pointed doors, strengthened by knobs of iron. Although he strained his eyes upward, Ayub could see nothing moving on the tower summits.

It was not easy to sit quietly in the saddle beneath bows that could slay them unseen, and the watchers from the caravans did not make matters easier.

"Since when did *giaours* send ambassadors to the Krim?" a voice taunted.

Minutes passed, and the crowd grew more vociferous. Evidently it dared not come upon the bridge, but it made no secret of its hatred of unbelievers, and prophecies were bandied back and forth in shrill speculation as to the fate that awaited the Christians.

"O ye without wit," one proclaimed. "O blind dogs, wearers of hats, eaters of filth, know ye not the gate is closed between sun and sun?"

Ayub gritted his teeth in a rage because he could not retort, because their lot would be no enviable one if they had to turn back now. But Stuart became impatient and, ignoring the threat of the arrow, reined his horse forward, drew his sword and smote the timbers of the door with the pommel. Echoes answered from within, and the caravan men ceased their shouting to listen.

Whether the watchers above had sent tidings of the strangers, or the Scot's tattoo roused the guards within, the great doors creaked and swung outward. A man strode through the opening. By his green turban and the robe thrown over one shoulder, Ayub recognised a mollah who had visited Mecca. With a thin arm he lifted the lantern he carried and looked briefly at the Cossack and searchingly at the officer.

"What seek ye?" he cried.

Ayub answered—

"To be taken to the Khan."

"Whence come ye?"

"From his Majesty, the King of Poland."

"There is no majesty save that of Allah, and no power save of his bestowing. What token was given thee?"

"The letter that will be placed at the feet of the Khan."

"*Hai!*" The gaunt mollah threw back his head and laughed. "What words are these? No word hath reached this place of the coming ambassadors. Nay, they have never come in my time or my father's time from the Franks. Who led thee hither, and where are thy men?"

Sensing the mood of the mollah, the crowd howled and began to push forward upon the bridge. To show Stuart's missive now would be to yield to the mollah, and the least sign of weakness would be fatal. Ayub edged his horse close to the bearded servant of Islam.

"We will ask of the Khan, 'Where are our companions?' Forty and two were beset and slain by the tribes on the road hither, and we alone may tell the tale of it. Give us safe escort to the Khan, or thy head will lack ears and thy mouth a tongue!"

The dark eyes of the mollah moved restlessly, and he motioned back the listeners who had edged forward.

"Think well," he said, "if thy words be true. If not—" he laughed soundlessly and turned, throwing his robe back upon his arm—"come, if ye dare!"

Stuart reined his horse forward, and the two passed through the open doors into a stone passage where the flicker of the lantern fell upon narrow embrasures and round holes high overhead. This part of the fortress seemed to be older than the rest, and had been built in the days when bows and liquid fire were the weapons of defense.

They crossed an open courtyard and here their guide bade them dismount. Throwing open the door of a bare chamber and pointing to a fine carpet, he said:

"Tomorrow ye shall mount for the ride to the Khan. Meat and wine shall be brought, for ye are infidels. May Allah direct your steps aright."

THEY did not see the mollah again. When the sun was high the next day a Tartar mirza appeared and bade them make ready for the road, since he would conduct them to the Khan. He was a dark, diminutive figure, clad in crimson and gold, and his horse was a blood Arab of price. He seemed astonished that the Christians had no goods or gear with them, and he exclaimed admiringly at sight of the piebald charger. He led them at a trot through the crowded courtyard and out to a highway where the earth was dry and free from snow.

Then the mirza let his Arab gallop. The four warriors who attended him fell in behind the Christians, and they thundered past the caravans that had set out before them, taking not the slightest trouble to turn aside for man or beast. The mule trains were hurried to the side of the road by anxious owners, and the slaves scuttled into the muddy ditch, to stare fearfully at the flashing robes and the tufted spears of the Tartars.

When he had scattered the foremost string of beasts, and had left an echo of mournful profanity in the air behind him, the little mirza looked around with satisfaction and reined in to a more sensible pace, motioning Ayub to ride abreast him.

For the rest of the morning they talked, and when they dismounted at noon to let the horses graze, the Cossack sought out Stuart and flung himself down in the brown grass.

"Not good, Little Father!" He shook his head and sighed, and the Scot waited in silence for him to relate his tidings in his own way. "May the devil take the Sultan and all the Turks, and these wasps of Tartars, too! May the foul fiends sit upon them. May their hides be made into dog whips!"

The Turks, he said, were already at the Krim court. A *wazir* had arrived in the last moon with a galley load of gifts, and an army corps had followed him—eleven thousand janizaries and *sipahis* who were to march under the standard of the Khan, up into the steppes and into Christian lands. They were preparing to take the field already, while the snow was still on the plains, before the spring rains made a marsh of the grasslands.

This was bad news and Stuart considered it gravely. If the Sultan had sent such a strong division out to the Krim peninsula for a flank movement, the Ottomans must be preparing to move with their full strength against Poland. There were fortresses along the southern frontier that could hold the main army of the Mohammedans in check—for a time. But Stuart, a cavalry officer himself, appreciated the havoc that would be wrought by this detached army, and especially by the fine Tartar cavalry of the Horde.

As usual, the Polish ministers had blundered. They had sent an ill assorted mission into the steppes, and it had been sent too late. The Turks were first in the field, and the tidings of the massacre of Prince Paul and the chancellor's party would only make the Khan contemptuous of the fighting qualities of the Poles. And Stuart had seen enough of the steppe dwellers to understand that a hint of weakness would draw the Tartars out of their fastness with fire and sword.

"Even the gold will work ill," he said to himself, thinking of the Nogai women who would soon be wearing his Majesty's gold thalers.

Better if it had never been sent. And noblewomen had brought their jewel caskets, and churches their candlesticks to make up the treasure.

"Is this true?" he asked Ayub.

"The red mirza is still rubbing his belly because he ate sugared mastic in the booths of the janizaries."

"Has the Khan sworn to support the Turkish envoy?"

"Satan knows—at least they were hunting together. They have left Bagchi Sarai. Eh, no good ever came of trying to wear another man's boots. We are not ambassadors, and they will plant us on stakes for the sport of the women."

"*Aida—aida!* Hasten—hasten!" cried the mirza of the red *khalat*, swinging into his stirrups again.

He cried out impatiently, because Stuart took his time, and he seemed to look upon his charges more as captives than envoys. He set out again at the same breakneck pace, although he must have seen that the horses of the strangers were tired. He rode with the short stirrups of the Mongol and the easy, swaying seat of the Arab, and he did not draw rein until they had left the sun warmed fields and plunged into a forest of dwarf oaks.

Here the trail narrowed and—because the oaks were still in leaf—they rode in shadow, sometimes stooping to pass under a gnarled branch. Presently the mirza dropped back until he could touch Ayub's arm.

"Look, *kaphar*, yonder are some of the Sultan's men."

Ayub had seen them already, a dozen horsemen who had been sitting by a stream, and who now were climbing into the saddle hastily. Their officer was an *agha*, by token of his white and gold mace. They were bigger men than the Tartars, clad in heavy garments and riding slippers. They had no shields or spears but carried long pistols in saddle holsters. Ayub knew they were Turks.

The *agha* made quite a fuss about drawing up his men as the Tartar detachment came up to him, and he called out to the red mirza the usual "*Salaam aleikoum!*"

The mirza, too, was inclined to be friendly.

"I greet thee, O companion of the road," he made response, his hand on his hip, and the head of his pacer pulled well up.

The Turk turned in his saddle, smiling, and suddenly snatched a pistol from its sheath. Ayub saw the hammer fall, and then smoke beat against his eyes, while his ears rang from the explosion.

The weapon had been thrust almost into the mirza's side, and the little Tartar swayed, catching at his saddle horn. He reached for his sword hilt with a quivering hand and half drew the blade. Then he groaned and fell forward upon the neck of his horse. Other pistols roared, and Ayub drew his *yataghan*, shouting with surprise and anger. But he made no other movement.

One of the Turks ran up and gripped the rein of his charger, and another pointed a pistol at his head. The Cossack saw that Stuart, just behind him, was caught in the same fashion. Through the haze of white smoke he made out the Tartars of the escort fighting savagely. The *agha* and eight men had closed in around them, and one of them had fallen.

Although wounded by pistol balls, the others clung to their seats, wielding their short sabers, and snarling defiance. One of them, beset by three men, slid under his horse, stabbed a Turk's charger from beneath and emerged on foot on the other side—grappled with another adversary and pulled him to the ground, under the wounded horse that reared frantically. When Ayub looked that way again, they were both dead, the Tartar warrior's head crushed and his hands locked around the hilt of a curved knife that he had pulled from the Turk's girdle and driven under his ribs.

The other three fought without asking or giving mercy, and without any thought of flight. One of them was hacked with scimitars until the blood, draining over his horse, made the animal rear and throw him. The last survivor held off his foes and plunged from the road, to the rocks of the stream, where he made good his ground with saber and shield until he fell with a pistol ball in his head.

WHEN the smoke drifted away between the trees, three of the Turks were dead and as many badly wounded in the body. The seven who were still unhurt gathered around the captives. They took Ayub's and Stuart's sword and pistol and brought them to the *agha*, who was nursing the sliced flesh on his jaw where a Tartar sword had grazed him.

He motioned for the saddlebags to be taken from the Christians and he seemed astonished when he found nothing but food and the Cossack's kit.

"Eh," he said in broken Nogai dialect, "where is the rest—the baggage?"

"Ask the wolves!" retorted the Cossack. "Where are the others of thy band?"

Ayub pointed at the bodies on the ground, and the officer stroked his jaw in silence.

"Art thou indeed from the king of Poland?" he asked presently.

"*They* could have told thee!" Ayub motioned toward the dead.

"Thou wilt be like that, soon," the *agha* muttered, "thou and the young Frank."

And then, because his jaw pained him, he spat suddenly into the Cossack's face. Ayub lunged toward him, but the officer's baton smashed against his forehead and he reeled back in the saddle. Stuart pushed his horse forward, and the Turks ran up, but Ayab gripped his friend's arm.

"Do not strike, Little Father."

At a sign from the *agha* the soldiers tied the feet of the captives—ankle knotted to ankle beneath the horse's belly. Ayub watched from beneath shaggy brows, while his captors dragged the bodies of the Krim men into the trees. He heard shovels striking into earth; then the saddles were taken from the Tartar ponies, and the *agha* had his own saddle changed to the white pacer that had belonged to the mirza. He mounted clumsily, and the high strung horse, excited by the conflict and the smell of blood, sidled and half reared. The wounded officer struck him over the head with the heavy baton.

Because the young horse was restless, or because his men delayed over the work of burial, the leader of the Turks called to two of his men to mount. He signed to Stuart and Ayub to follow, and set out, whipping the white Arab into a gallop before the swift paced horse had time to find its gait. The two soldiers closed in behind the captives and when Ayub glanced back at them, one fingered his long pistol meaningly.

The *agha* seemed both anxious and in haste. When they came out of the wood into a rolling plain that stretched to the blue line of distant hills, he looked around on all sides—at the distant tents of herders and the road ahead of him. Then he turned off into a narrow trail and settled down into a steady trot.

DUNCAN STUART, with his ankles aching from the ropes and his shoulders and thighs stiff from long hours in the saddle, was almost happy, although he looked utterly indifferent. He had slept through the night, although the Turks had given him no better food than barley soaked in water and had bedded him down in the dirty straw behind the horses. They had passed the night in a hut where the trail entered a ravine, and the Turks had taken some pains to hide the glow of their fire.

It was clear that the *agha* did not wish his captives to be seen. The treacherous attack upon the Tartars could have only one cause. The Sultan's men had been sent to intercept the ambassadors and to do it secretly. How word of their presence had reached the Turks, he did not know. Perhaps there had been spies at the gate of the caravans. Perhaps the Tartars had sent one of their riders ahead.

But surely the envoy from Constantinople could not have bound the Khan to an alliance, since the Turks had hunted down the Christian envoys. And, for some reason, the Turks must find his presence dangerous if they risked discovery in this manner.

Stuart did not know what was in store for him, and he expected no gentle treatment. Ayub had passed more than one hour on the road relating the tortures favored by the Ottomans, and flaying a man limb by limb was not the worst. No doubt the Turks meant to question him, and he had no delusions as to how this would be done.

It was clear that he was being taken to the Turkish camp, since his captors took such precautions to hide him from the eyes of the Krim men. Indeed, if the story of the attack on the mirza—the true story—were known to the Tartars, matters would not go well with the Turks. Stuart wondered what the Khan of the Krim was like.

He noticed that day that they saw few horsemen in the hills. Women in bright *khalats* and children stared at them from a distance, and here and there old men were out with cattle herds. But they encountered no bands of horsemen and no one approached near them. Probably from afar they looked like three officers with two troopers following. Only once did they pass Tartar soldiers, when the trail, climbing the foothills, entered a ravine so narrow that Stuart could touch the sheer walls of granite by stretching out both his arms. The defile was no more than the bed of a stream, filled with worn stones. But when the weary horses scrambled up the last ascent they came out into a place that made Stuart catch his breath.

It was the summit of the pass—a level expanse of gravel as hard as a parade ground. In shape it was rough square, a long musket shot across, but instead of being the open summit of the hills, it was a valley surrounded by cliffs so lofty that Stuart had to raise his head to look at the summits. And these blue-gray cliffs rose in tiers to jagged rock masses against the cloud flecked sky. On some of the ledges he saw the dark mouths of caverns and myriad clefts.

But these rock walls fell away in four places, as if the giants who shaped this plateau on the heights had hewn them asunder. Through the gaps he could see the horizon far below the hills. And through these ravines the wind surged gustily, sending the dust devils dancing over the ground.

"Ho, *kaphars*," grinned Zain ad-Din, the *agha*. "Look well, for this is the second gate—aye, the Gate of the Winds!"

And faint, clear echoes answered "Ho, *kaphars!*" flinging the words back and forth between the rock walls. The whole place was a subdued tumult of sounds that trailed away like the ripple of water. In the center of the arena stood Tartar *yurts*, and here in the sun sat a few score warriors talking with a patrol of horsemen in round steel helmets and chain armor, who carried long lances—a detachment of Turkish *sipahis*, the best of the Sultan's cavalry.

"The two roads meet here." Zain ad-Din pointed to the other ravines. "Look well, for ye will not see the pass again."

Stuart had already noticed that paths zigzagged up the rocks, leading to the upper ledges. On the highest pinnacles tiny black figures moved against the passing clouds. For the most part the ledges and paths were deserted, but at need several thousand men could have stationed themselves on the heights of this citadel of rocks. If cannon had been placed at the summit of the ravines, the defenders of the Gate of the Winds could have maintained themselves against any siege. The plateau was large enough for several regiments of cavalry.

They had come out of the smallest of the ravines, and they must have been sighted from the heights above, because a Tartar officer mounted his horse near the *yurts* and cantered across the dusty arena toward them. Zain ad-Din spoke to his two troopers and hastened off to meet the officer. They met and talked a hundred paces away, and the Tartar, glancing idly toward the captives, saw only four men halted in the deep shadow of the cliff. The sun beat into the valley and the heat simmered over the dusty ground, although the breath of the wind was chill; it seemed natural enough that the *agha's* men should keep to the shade—and no one saw that his two troopers had loaded pistols in their hands.

The Tartar officer of the guard seemed more interested in the *agha's* white Arab than in the waiting men, and presently he turned back to his tents.

"Eh, Sir Brother—" Ayub broke a silence that had lasted for a night and a day—"let us ride toward the tents. We will fall with bullets in us, or steel. But that is better than the skinning knives that we will feel when we stand before the dog of a captain general of the Turks."

Stuart glanced at him quickly. In the Cossack's seamed and blistered face was a gleam of desperation. That morning the Turks had bound their wrists with ropes of twisted leather thongs and the heat had made the bruised flesh swell until it was agony to move an arm, or hold the reins. Ayub had sunk into a black mood.

"Wait," said the Scot quietly.

But Ayub only shook his head, his bound hands caught in his beard. He saw no good in waiting. His bones ached and he had not eaten since Zain ad-Din had spat in his face.

"What is it you say?" Stuart asked him. " 'The Cossacks still have powder, and their strength?' "

"*Ekh ma!*" Ayub lifted his head. "It was said long ago by an ataman who was surrounded by enemies. 'There is powder still in the powder-horns—the Cossack strength is not broken!' That is what the brothers call out when matters go hard with them."

"And how is it with us?"

"We have no weapons. Nothing ahead but the knives."

The brief gleam of interest passed from the big man's face, and Stuart saw that he had failed to rouse Ayub from the moodiness that was like a sickness.

"One of us must reach the Khan," he said. "For that we were sent. When did a Cossack turn aside from the road because he feared the end of the road?”

“By God, never!” Ayub smote his two hands upon his saddle horn and cursed the stab of pain that made his arms quiver. “I do not fear the Turks, and I will not leave you, but a bullet is better than the flaying knife that lifts your skin a little at a time.”

“Will you go on with the *agha* like a tied dog?”

But even the taunt did not make Ayub angry.

“Zain ad-Din is a fox,” he muttered. “He has the tongue of a woman. Just now he went up to the Tartar officer on that Arab—and came away unharmed.”

“Why not?”

“He was riding a Tartar horse of price and the other knew it, yet he was not made to dismount.”

Stuart looked up quickly.

“Nay, one white Arabian is like another—and Zain ad-Din has his own saddle.”

“The *tamgha*—the brand on the flank. All Tartar clans have their brand marks. The mark on the white Arabian is a circle with a spear through it—and such horses are not often given as gifts,” Ayub answered indifferently.

This gave the Scot food for thought, and he looked for the *tamgha* himself on the flank of Zain ad-Din's stolen mount. As the Cossack had said, the outline of a circle could be traced through the heavy winter coat of the animal.

ZAIN AD-DIN led them through the southern ravine of the Gate of the Winds and, as soon as the gorge yielded to the open mountainside, he turned off into a cattle trail. Here they had to ride in file, and it was some time before Stuart could speak to Ayub again.

“Before we reach the Turkish camp,” he said, “just before, we will do as you have said. It may be tomorrow or the next day, or the next, and until then we will watch for a chance to get free. If there is no chance, faith, we'll make one.”

Ayub bent his head to listen, and looked around anxiously at the Turks, although not one of their captors understood a word they said. His bound hands quivered on his thigh.

“How make one?”

“We have no weapons and can't use our hands. But something will aid us.”

“May God give it! Only, what?”

Stuart started to speak, and smiled. Leaning forward, he rested his hands on the sweat streaked mane of the piebald horse.

“He took us out of the storm and he will aid us now.”

The Cossack looked keenly at the spotted horse, which favored a lame foreleg as he trotted stiffly after the *agha's* smooth paced Arab. The horses had been pushed hard the last two days, and ill fed. Their coats were rough and plastered with mud.

“Zain ad-Din's nag will run down the wolf chaser now,” he said, “and even the trooper's mounts will keep up with you.”

“I trust the wolf chaser.” Stuart thought for a moment. “It is better to take the chance than go like sheep to the butcher. This is a trick that the *agha's* men will not know. When we are in broken country, with woods or brush near, I will call to you, and push past Zain ad-Din at a gallop. The Turks will follow, and they may fire with their pistols. They will have their eyes on me, and you must make no move—until Zain ad-Din spurs after me. Then turn swiftly, and make for cover, to the side. Even if the troopers have fired their pistols, they may miss. 'Tis no easy thing to send a ball straight from a galloping horse.”

Ayub nodded, his tousled mustache twitching in a grin.

“You to go one way—I another. Well, that works sometimes. But those sons of dogs may all follow you, and you have the king's letter.”

Again a faint smile touched the Scot's lips. Zain ad-Din had searched their garments and boots, but Stuart's missive still lay where he had placed it, folded under his broad leather belt. He had not taken that belt off, and the Turks had not seemed to think that an envoy's papers could be stuck under a belt. The *agha* had no reason to search more carefully because the envoys were prisoners in his hands, their secrets soon to be drawn from them.

"I trust the wolf chaser," he responded. "If you get clear and I fall, go to the nearest Tartars, ask to be taken to the Khan, and tell how the Nogais slew the ambassadors, and how the Turks dealt with his officer in the wood. Bid them search in the wood for the bodies. As to the message from the king, the real ambassadors are dead and there is nothing you can say. But I know the Tartars a little, and if the Khan discovers that his men have been set upon and slain, he will do nothing until he has avenged them."

"*Aya tak*, that is so. But if you escape, how will you talk to the Krim men?"

"I can not talk to them, not to a soul in all this land of the Krim."

Ayub waited for his friend to say more; however, Stuart remained silent and it was Zain ad-Din who broke the silence.

"Ho, ye hat wearers! Look! The road—this is the end."

They had been passing through a nest of boulders, and the *agha* had gone ahead to the brow of a ridge that overlooked the mountainside. When Stuart and Ayub joined him, they stopped instantly.

The ridge gave them a clear view for miles to the south, into a plain that stretched without break to the horizon. And this plain was green, from crops or grass. They saw scattered huts by groves of fruit trees, and far off the gleam of a winding river. The sun, on this side of the range, burned into their faces, and the mild breath of the wind was warm. A faint heat haze veiled the horizon.

This, Stuart thought, was the pasture land of the Krim, always free from snow. What drew his eyes at once and made Ayub mutter in his beard was the great encampment below them.

It was not one camp, but two, a half mile or so apart across the river. On the east of the river, the ground was covered with the domed tents of the Tartars, in the clear places masses of animals grazing. The sun glinted on the horns of cattle, and the bright robes of riders moved like flecks of color against the gray-brown horse herds. Smoke curled up from scattered fires.

To the west of the river appeared the huts and pavilions of a different sort. Some of the pavilions with their red and white sun curtains seemed as large as castles. The lines of regular streets ran through the camp, and a breastwork had been thrown up around it. In a cleared place the sun reflected upon brass. Stuart thought that cannon were parked here. Streamers and banners marked different sections, and there were few horses to be seen, but many men on foot in more somber colors.

"The camp of the Kapitan Pasha," said Zain ad-Din. "Aye, Murad, the Pasha of the Sea."

CHAPTER VII

COMRADES

THE NEAREST portion of the Turkish camp was less than two miles away. The path they were following ran close to the river on this side. Across the stream some Krim men were watering their horses, and others were more to the left, apparently flying falcons at the herons that started up from the rushes, but not a Tartar was on their side of the river. The path was clear to the gate of the breastwork, where some guards sat watching peasant carts go in and out. Zain ad-Din was well content. He had obeyed orders, had found and taken the envoys of the Christian king and had brought them safely within sight of his Sultan's army. The evidence of his attack upon the Tartars was well hidden, and the two Christians, half starved men on wearied horses, had nothing more to hope for. Zain ad-Din, as he trotted down the winding trail, wondered whether the Kapitan Pasha would reward him with jewels, or a new command.

"Thou seest," he cried, thrusting his baton into the Cossack's ribs. "There is peace and agreement between the host of Krim and the Ottomans. Soon the Moslem scimitar will strike, and thy brothers' heads will fall like cut grain, and as for thy sisters—"

"I know them well," growled the old Cossack, roused by the taunt. "And they will fall by the men, sword in hand. But as for thee, knowest thou thy sisters?"

The face of the lean *agha* darkened and he clutched at one of the daggers in his girdle. Then his teeth gleamed in a smile, and he spurred on the white pacer.

"Hasten—hasten! Thy fate is near."

Even the troopers urged on their jaded horses, for the breath of the plain was hot, and the breastwork less than a mile away. Already some of the guards had turned to gaze at the five riders.

Stuart watched the distant figures through narrowed eyes and laughed over his shoulder at the Cossack.

"Well said, O my brother. The Cossack strength is not spent."

"Well, we will look soon at our fate. Why did you not try the trick back in the thickets of the hill? There is no cover here and in a moment the dogs yonder will be leading our horses."

"Wait."

The Scot's lips tightened and he moved his hands between the ropes. A group of janizaries who had wandered out to the fruit trees waved at them and shouted. Beyond this grove the plain stretched as flat as a desert floor to the half mile distant river.

Stuart turned in his saddle and smiled at his friend.

"What was it you said before the duel in Kudak?"

"What, eh? To one of us life, to the other death!"

"That was it. Well, now is the time, Ayub. When the *agha* starts after me, go for the river, and don't look back or turn aside. Go with God."

Ayub answered mechanically, "With God," before he realized that the Scot had struck the piebald horse on the side away from Zain ad-Din with his heel. Surprised and hurt, the spotted horse lunged forward into a gallop. It passed the *agha's* Arab and took the road, its head thrust out, its flanks heaving.

Zain ad-Din watched, at first with curiosity and then—when he urged on the pacer and the gap between them did not diminish—with anger. It was no part of his plan to have his prisoner a runaway into the Turkish camp.

"Stop!" he shouted, and lashed on his Arab.

The swifter horses drew away from the three following. For a moment they all held their places. Looking over his shoulder, Stuart saw that the *agha* was about ten yards behind him, and some fifty yards ahead of the other three.

Suddenly and without warning of any kind, the Scot flung himself back in the saddle, crying out to his horse as he did so. The wolf chaser plunged and came to a stop, all four legs gathered under him. At the same instant the horse wheeled and reared, lashing out with its forelegs.

And the lashing hoofs and all the weight of horse and rider came down on Zain ad-Din.

The *agha* had tried in vain to check the rush of his own horse when he saw the wolf chaser rear in front of him. But he was too near, the time too short. His Arab half wheeled, and the result was to throw the white horse.

The crash sent the piebald charger reeling back. If it had fallen, with Stuart's ankles bound beneath, the Scot could not have escaped from the saddle. With a stagger and lurch the spotted horse recovered its balance, quivering all over. Then Stuart reined over to Zain ad-Din.

The *agha* lay motionless, blood dripping from his open teeth. He had fallen on his right side, and the scimitar sheath in his girdle was caught under one leg. Stuart, hearing hoofs thudding close to him, slipped his feet from the stirrups and flung himself toward the unconscious man.

With his hands bound together, it was his only chance to grip the scimitar hilt, and grip it he did, although he hung by one knee from the saddle. The rope that bound his ankles kept him from falling clear, and the piebald horse stood quiet. He drew the sword with one hand. And then with an effort that sent a wrenching pain through his hip and shoulder, he swung himself up far enough to catch the saddle horn with his free hand. Another pull and he was back in the saddle, just as the Turkish trooper who had hastened toward him, slashed down at his head with a sword.

Quickly as Stuart flung up his own blade to parry, he could not quite check the blow. The steel blade, near the hand guard, struck his lynx skin cap and grazed his skull.

But the rush of the trooper's horse carried him past, and when he wheeled and came in to strike again, Stuart had found his stirrups and had raised his scimitar.

"Allah!" the Turk cried, and slashed with all his strength.

But a blade in the hands of a skilled swordsman—even though his hands were tied together—overmatched the Moslem soldier.

Once the horses reared, and the steel rang out. Twice the blades clashed, and then the Turk fell, cut across the eyes, and Stuart wrenched his scimitar clear.

He turned to look for Ayub. But the Cossack was not riding for the river, had not left the road.

Instead, two riders were locked together in a crushing embrace, while their horses danced and wheeled like two ships moored together in a swift current. Without trying to guess what had happened, Stuart raced the wolf chaser back to them.

He saw that the Turk held a knife in one hand and a pistol in the other, and was twisting desperately to free an arm. Ayub had thrown his bound arms over the trooper's shoulders, pinning the other's forearms to his sides. The curved knife was moving spasmodically an inch from his ribs, but the giant Cossack, exerting all the strength of his shoulders, squeezed his enemy's bones in a vise-like grip. The Turk was panting, and foam puffed between his loose lips.

"*Hai*, Little Father!" Ayub grunted. "Don't cut—thrust him under the arm."

Stuart drew back his scimitar as the soldier with a convulsive effort discharged his pistol toward Ayub. But the ball went wide, although the spraying powder blackened the Cossack's cheek. Then, seeing death inevitable, the Turk turned his eyes up and dropped his knife.

Instead of thrusting him through, the Scot pulled the trooper's scimitar from its sheath in his girdle, and with it cut the ropes that bound Ayub's wrists.

"Take one sword—here!" he cried. "Now cut these cords."

When the Cossack had sliced the leather thongs from his throbbing wrists, Stuart wasted no second of precious time upon the Turk. Instead, he turned back and galloped to the white Arab that had regained its feet and was standing near Zain ad-Din. The pacer snorted and sprang away at his coming, but in another moment suffered itself to be caught. He drew the dangling rein over his arm, wiped the blood from his eye and shouted to Ayub to ride toward the river.

A glance over his shoulder showed him that the guards at the gate of the camp were running about and pointing toward him. Behind him, from the grove whence the janizaries had been drawn by the sound of fighting, a pistol roared, and the ball whipped past him, over his head.

He urged the spotted horse on to the river, drawing up to the Cossack, whose horse was stumbling badly. The Turkish trooper lay huddled as if sleeping in the high grass, and Ayub was wiping clean his blade with his foe's turban cloth. Riders —*sipahis* with lances—were galloping out of the gate, but the river was less than a quarter mile away and at the far bank the Tartars who had been spectators of the fighting were watching expectantly.

Stuart slowed the spotted horse to keep pace with the winded stallion.

"Why didn't you ride off as we agreed?" he demanded of the Cossack.

"Eh, why did you turn back into the *agha?* Impossible to ride off and leave a comrade to fight three Turks? They'd have cut you down. *Hai*—you went into Zain ad-Din like a Cossack!"

Ayub struck his horse with the flat of his blade and galloped headlong into the stream without pausing to look for fords. Rising in his stirrups, he shouted at the Tartars.

"*Hi*, ye men of the Krim! We are ambassadors to the Khan!"

CHAPTER VIII

DIPLOMATIC TRUTH

ARAK BUKA, Khan of all the Hordes, descendant of Mohammed, Lord of the Krim, and Master of Bagchi Sarai, sat on his heels and looked with pleasure at what lay before him. Two antelopes, a young panther and a black marten lay outstretched in front of the pavilion opening, and they had fallen to Arak Buka's bow that morning. The Khan was seventy and six years of age, his black eyes gleamed out of a mass of wrinkles, and the hair hidden by the black velvet cap was white, but he could still sit in the saddle from sun to sun and bring down beasts with his hunting bow.

More than hunting, he relished leading the Horde afield, as he had done for half a century. True, the *ordus* were commanded by his four sons and some twoscore grandsons; but not one of his offspring would have dreamed of defying the authority of that thin and aged veteran. A dozen of them in gold trimmed *khalats* sat behind him, and behind them were grouped as many mirzas—officers of high birth—and beyond them the slaves who hastened to bring snow cooled wine to the carpet of the Khan, who munched sunflower seeds and hemp as he contemplated the result of his morning's hunt.

"Take them—thou and thou—" he nodded to four officers who rose and hastened to press their heads to the carpet at his knees at this signal favor.

Then, because the aged Khan watched them, the four mirzas hurried to pick up the game, and carry the carcasses off on their own shoulders.

The Khan chewed on his string of hemp, his eyes closed.

Only one thing marred his content. His brother, the Sultan of the Ottomans, Lord of Stamboul,* had sent a strong force of infantry, with a dozen cannon and some regiments of supporting cavalry, to aid him in the new war upon the unbelievers. And this division was commanded by a certain Kapitan Pasha who was a notable leader upon the sea. In fact, this right hand officer of the Sultan had spent most of his life on galleys and had matched his strength against the Barbary pashas.

But it was clear to the Khan, although he kept his own counsel about it, that this captain general of the Turks knew little about handling cavalry. Murad Pasha had come with his galleys more than once to besiege the coast cities of the Krim, but Arak Buka did not hold this against him. That had been the war of brothers—and what would life be without war?

Murad Pasha now demanded that the Khan advance at once with his cavalry division and the Turkish infantry division, across the steppe while the snow roads were still good. That was very well for infantry, but it would be hard for the horses.

The Khan was willing enough to march into Poland, and for the time being he was at peace with his brother, the Sultan, but Murad's insistence made him angry. His horses were not in condition for such a march. So he had assembled some fifteen thousand of the Krim riders and occupied himself with hunting, fully determined not to move north until he was ready, Murad Pasha and all the Turks to the contrary.

While he chewed drowsily upon the hemp, a shaven mollah standing beside him reading aloud verses from the Koran, the Khan's eye was caught by a mailed figure that dismounted a stone's throw from the wide entrance of his sitting pavilion, and advanced toward him, kneeling outside the ropes. He held up his hand and the mollah ceased reading. He nodded, and the bearded Tartar who held a spear across his knees as he stood by the entrance—and by that token was officer of the day's guard—cried out to the messenger—

---

*Constantinople

"Speak!"

The man lifted his hands to his helmet and bent his head to the ground. Then, still upon his knees, he cried out:

"Two Franks have come to the *ordu*. O Khan of the Horde, O *sayyid*, O Pole of the Faith, and Lord of Krim, these Franks are envoys from Poland."

A murmur of whispering filled the pavilion, and Arak Buka opened his eyes.

"What dogs are these? Is it not known that I have lifted my standard for war? Send them away."

The messenger bent his head.

"I have heard. And yet, O Lord my Khan, they have with them a letter. Will the Soul of the Krim see the letter?"

Slowly the bony jaws of the aged man resumed their chewing, and his eyelids drooped.

"What is a letter brought by dogs? Have they gifts?"

"Naught have they but their horses, good horses. Their coming was in this manner: They were riding across the plain with three Turks, and then they were seen to fight with the Turks, of whom all three were left on the ground. Then they turned their heads toward the river which is the boundary of our camp. They have also," the methodical Tartar added, "another good horse, taken from the Turkish officer."

Arak Buka stopped chewing, and his thin fingers caressed a worn gold bracelet upon his wrist under the gray silk sleeve. He was still a splendid figure, and he had all the fire of impetuosity and recklessness—with an insatiable desire for gifts and spoil.

"Do ambassadors fight like leopards?" he said. "Let the horses be led before me."

WHEN the Tartars of the guard were running up with the leg weary beasts, two black robed attendants hastened up the slope to the pavilion entrance. They carried staffs, and they wore turbans with crowns like sugar loaves, and they cried out loudly—

"The Master of the Stirrup of the Pasha comes to the footstool of the Majesty of the Krim!"

Behind the wand bearers advanced a Turkish officer with an ermine bordered cloak, worn upon one shoulder, behind him other officers. They salaamed deeply, breathing heavily from the haste of their coming, and the Khan's fine eyes looked at them with some surprise.

"O Lord of Bagchi Sarai," the Master of the Stirrup cried, "we beg that thy generosity will give into our hands the captives who escaped from an *agha* of the Sultan."

Arak Buka had been looking over the horses, and his eye lingered on the big wolf chaser and wandered to the white Arabian.

"There is blood on that one," he observed.

The Master of the Stirrup stepped forward.

"Aye, by Allah, the blood of a believer. That is the *agha's* horse."

Again Arak Buka looked at the brand mark on the pacer's flank, and something seemed to puzzle him. Finally he spat out the hemp and handed it to the nearest mollah to eat, as a sign of favor.

"By Allah, there is too much talk," he grumbled. "If the Franks are indeed ambassadors, they were sent to me. Let them come before me."

The assemblage of Turks bowed, to hide their anger. They had not been invited within the shade of the pavilion where the Tartars sat at ease on the carpets, and the sun did not improve their mood.

When Duncan Stuart and Ayub were escorted to the pavilion entrance by spearmen of the guard, there was utter silence. Many of the Krim lords had never seen a man like the Scot. He had had neither time nor means to clean the dried blood from his head and cheek, and Ayub's shaggy countenance was black with powder. Their swords had been taken by the guards. But they stood erect, half a head taller than the largest of the Turks.

After Arak Buka had considered them awhile, he asked for the letter that had been sent him, and Ayub interpreted to Stuart. The Scot felt under his belt and drew out the square of parchment folded many times. Slowly he opened this, and when he stepped forward, two Tartars sprang to catch and hold him by the shoulders. They led him to the carpet of the Khan and motioned him to place the missive at Arak Buka's knees.

This he did, and the aged Tartar gazed at it curiously.

"Read!" he commanded.

A long robed mollah picked up the parchment, studied the seal and shook his head. He handed it to another who fingered his beard in silence. A third reader of the Koran announced that it was not written in Arabic, or Syriac, or Turkish, or even Greek.

"Read it thyself!" the Khan commanded Stuart, and Ayub prompted his friend.

The Scot took the missive and looked into the dark eyes of the master of the Krim.

"This is the message, O Khan of the Horde," he explained slowly.

> "To thee gives greeting Sigismund of Poland. Long has there been peace between the Commonwealth and the Krim; nor is there now any cause for conflict between them. Many enemies has Poland, and long has the Commonwealth been at war.
>
> "The eagles of Poland are strong, their wings untiring. They will rise from the conflict as they have done before, victorious, and they will drive the spoilers again beyond their country. The foes of the eagles will count their dead and grieve—as they have done before.
>
> "Not of his own will does the Khan of the Krim move to war, but at the will of the Ottoman Sultan. Is the Khan a peregrine falcon, to be hooded by a master and loosed at game when the master pleases? It was not so in the day of Tamerlane when the Golden Horde were lords of the steppe.
>
> "Is the Khan less than his ancestors? Is he indeed a blind falcon, not seeing that the hand that feeds him takes his prey from him. The Ottoman Sultan looks upon him as a servant and sends commands to him by an officer. Let the Khan consider and act wisely."

When Ayub had translated the last word there was a general silence. Never before had the Tartars listened to such an exhortation by Christians—and Stuart's eloquence lost nothing in Ayub's vivid rendering. The mollahs muttered together, for they had been preaching a holy war against the Franks, and the apparition of two wounded envoys was not to their liking. The few Turks who understood looked astonished.

The aged Khan, kneeling on the green carpet of the dais, lifted a finger to his lips and meditated, while he fixed the words in his memory.

"I have heard the message of the khan of the Christians," he said calmly. "Now I will hear how the message was brought to me, to this place."

And when the Cossack turned to Stuart, he added curtly—

"Let the Kazak speak and the young officer be silent."

He closed his eyes expectantly, and the two boy slaves who moved the feathered fans behind his head became very attentive, for the old Tartar was never so alert as when he pretended to doze; they knew this to their cost.

Ayub thrust his hands into his girdle and looked around at the rows of thin, dark faces that stared up at him without expression. It had been easy to interpret Stuart's message, but what was he to say? His throat was dry with dust, and there was nothing in his head but pain. Behind set teeth Ayub cursed all ambassadors and all the Poles. He was no fox to beguile a multitude with tricks.

"O ye men of Krim," he said hoarsely, "since when have ye suffered envoys to stand like foundered horses, without wine to cool their throats? Spirits are better than wine."

They stirred restlessly, because to offer food or drink was to acknowledge strangers as guests. A bearded mirza whispered to Arak Buka and then signed to a cupbearer, who poured white liquid into a deep bowl and came forward to the Cossack. Ayub took it in his hands and sniffed. The bowl was filled with distilled spirits mixed with mare's milk. He stroked down his mustaches, and lifted it joyfully, booming forth—

"Health to ye!"

He handed the silver vessel back to the cupbearer, who hastened to fill it again and offer it. It was a custom of the Krim not to refrain from offering wine until a guest made a sign that he wished no more, but Ayub was not aware of this.

"Health to ye!"

Again he lifted the silver bowl, and again he emptied it with deep swallows without lowering it. A murmur rose from the watchers. The guests in the Khan's presence were expected to drink down all that was offered them, and not to do so was to slight the hospitality of the Krim. But this giant emptied bowls as if they were cups.

Ayub felt Stuart's eyes upon him questioningly, and he gave voice to his trouble.

"Sir Brother, the Khan has commanded you to be silent, and me to explain how that writing was brought."

"Tell the truth," the Scot responded quickly, and then Ayub saw before him the cupbearer again, holding out the silver bowl.

"Well," he muttered, "our fate is near, and 'tis better to have this milk vodka under our belts."

His own girdle irked him, and he loosened it, then gripped the vessel and drank it down, more slowly this time, and the Tartar servant looked into it and held it upside down, to show the watchers that for the third time it was empty.

THE COSSACK'S heart began to beat strongly, and heat crept into all his veins. Spreading his feet wide, he looked around at the assemblage, surprised because the lines of faces had merged into a dark mass. He shook his head, and the mass began to revolve slowly about the tent pole. And, staring at the great gilded pole, Ayub fancied that it also was turning upon its axis. He had eaten nothing for two days and had drunk down enough of the fermented milk and pure spirits to make a bullock reel.

"No more!"

He heard Stuart's voice, blurred, as if from a distance, and he shook his head to quiet the throbbing in his ears. He began to speak and found that all hoarseness had left his voice. In fact, it carried to the lines of the outer guards, and filled the tent with its roar.

"O Lord of the Krim, Eagle of the Steppe, Master of all the Hordes, this is how the letter was brought. We were many, and we had many wagons filled with gold to be brought to thee, and a prince and a White Beard to repeat to thee the words of the Christian king. Aye, ten thousand pieces of gold and other gifts that would have filled this *yurt*."

Ayub waved a stalwart arm in a sweeping circle.

"The jackals that hunt beyond thy gate, the gully lurking jackals, the Nogais, came upon us without warning and slew and seized, and we twain are all that lived when the swords of the Nogais were sheathed."

And he related the details of their ride through the storm and hiding in the village of their foes.

"And why did these jackals tear us? It is true that the Turks sent gold and an officer to lead them against us. Nay, the kites are fattening upon the body of that officer! And what did the dogs of Turks do then? When we had entered thy gate, they shot down thy men, our escort."

He told how Zain ad-Din had come up to the mirza, and how the Tartars had died, and it seemed to him that the throbbing in his ears became a roar. In fact, scores of the listeners were upon their feet, some crying out in anger, and some—the mollahs and the Turks among them—mocking him. These were in the majority and their shouts drowned his voice.

"Proof, let there be proof!"

"What lies are these? The *giaour* was sent hither with lies!"

"To the stake with the Nazarenes!"

"Ho, ye Muslimin, is a snake to creep among us? Strike him with steel. This is no envoy!"

In all the clamor one word penetrated to the Cossack's understanding.

"Proof!" he roared above the tumult. He stretched his arms out and pulled back his long sleeves. "Look, ye Muslimin! Were these scars made by a girl's bracelet?"

His swollen wrists and the torn and matted sores on his hairy forearms were mute testimony to the ropes that had bound him.

"Will ye have proof?" he went on when the outcry had dwindled because the watchers had become curious. "Then ask the men of the Horde who were watering at the river and saw us beat down the Turks with their own weapons. Ask them what weapons were in our hands! And then send riders on swift horses, back to the road at the oak forest, and bid them dig up and bring before the Khan the bodies of his men."

There was silence then, because Ayub had spoken in the presence of the Khan, of Tartars who had been killed by the Sultan's men, and every listener bent forward to hear what the old chieftain might be pleased to say.

Arak Buka opened his eyes and, without paying any attention to Ayub, signed to the Turkish Master of the Stirrup to come forward, and a way was opened for the officer who flung back his dolman and salaamed low, remaining on his knees.

"Is it true," asked Arak Buka, "what thou didst say at first, that these Christians are the prisoners of the Sultan?"

"May Allah be my witness, it is true."

Ayub stepped forward unsteadily.

"Send to the oak forest!"

But the Khan took no heed of his words, and before he could speak again, the officer of the Tartar guard advanced to the dais.

"Speak!" murmured Arak Buka.

"Murad Pasha comes, O my Khan, to sit with thee."

LIKE an eagle stooping to earth, Murad Pasha came, calm eyed, amid a throng of horsemen and glittering, lofty turbans. His attendants brought gifts to the Khan—a brown and white *kafalka*, a peregrine falcon with a silver chain, and a gold box of musk, and a lump of sweet smelling ambergris as large as a man's head. The Pasha himself wore only the uniform of the *sipahis,* although the crest of his turban was that of a minister of the Ottoman Empire. A sallow faced man, broad and tranquil and merciless—and unafraid. He took as if by right a seat on the blue carpet beside the Khan and leaned back on the pillows that the slaves hastened to bring.

It was sunset by then, because the Captain General of the Sea had not hurried, and the Tartar slaves moved among the throng, lighting the lanterns and raising them upon spears. The throng had grown to a multitude and thousands of eyes stared into the open front of the pavilion, watching every movement of the two leaders of Islam, while the Khan feasted his distinguished guest from trays of almonds and mastic and melons. Neither spoke of the Christian prisoners, and only outside the tent did men dare whisper of what had passed.

The Khan had taken the falcon upon his wrist for a moment and then handed it to one of his officers.

Stuart could learn nothing from their faces, for the old Tartar seemed only concerned about his hospitality, and the Pasha about nothing at all. The Khan's musicians were sent for and disturbed the twilight with the whining of flutes and the squealing of bagpipes, and blare of horns. The envoys, seated among the lesser officers below the dais, were left to themselves, and this was not a good sign.

It was Murad Pasha who spoke of them, looking in their direction, idly.

"*Allah kirbadiz partalouk!* May Allah protect thy shadow, O my uncle! I have heard that men of mine have taken captive two *giaours* who say they were sent to thee. As to that I know not, but keep thou the Nazarenes, as a gift from my hand."

Arak Buka nodded slightly, and after a moment the Pasha added:

"Soon, if God wills it, we shall mount for the journey against the Christian cities, and the gathering of spoils. Let this evening be rendered pleasant and our eyes refreshed by the slaying of the two Nazarenes. If indeed they be envoys from the insolent king, their death will be a fitting response. If they be liars, the stake is a good sitting place for them."

The old Tartar thought for a moment.

"Is it thy desire?"

And the Turk's fine teeth flashed in a smile.

"Verily, it would please me, for it is written that the faithful shall be made glad by the downfall of unbelievers."

A soft murmur came from the listening readers of the Koran—

"True, true!"

"My officer, who took them," Murad added indifferently, "saw the letter they bore, but who can read what is written upon it? Nay, only the two *giaours* can say what is written."

Arak Buka raised his hand to his lips and shook his head as if this thought had not struck him before.

"How did thy servant come upon these dogs, O my nephew?"

There was no relationship between the Tartar and the Turkish Pasha, or the Sultan whom he called his brother by custom, but the words implied trust, and Murad clapped his hands together, calling out to his more distant followers. From beyond the lights an officer hastened forward and cast himself down at the dais. And Ayub started, seeing that he was Zain ad-Din, pallid from loss of blood, but resplendent in a new tunic and caftan and his *agha's* helmet.

"O my uncle," the Pasha explained, "here is the servant to answer thy question."

"Speak!" Arak Buka closed his eyes as if wearied by the many lights.

"By the threefold oath, by the grave of the Prophet I swear," cried Zain ad-Din, "that when I rode with two followers I came up with these twain crossing the ravine that leads to the Gate of the Winds. We rode up with our pistols in hand and took their weapons, and then bound them and led them to the Pasha's camp. In the plain across the river the young Nazarene tricked me and threw me from my horse, and the twain escaped to the river. The rest thou knowest."

"Said I not," Ayub whispered to his comrade, "that the *agha* had a woman's wit? He has been told all that was said here before him. And the Khan has not sent to look for the bodies."

"What would it prove if he did?" the Scot asked quietly, and Ayub could only gnaw his mustache.

Arak Buka considered, his eyes still shut and his thin face tranquil.

"They brought thy horse also," he observed.

And Zain ad-Din remembered that the Khan was acquisitive where horses were involved.

"May it find favor in thy sight, O Majesty of the Krim," he cried, "if thou wilt accept the horse as a gift."

"A good horse." The old Tartar nodded approvingly, and even commanded that the Arabian be led before the pavilion entrance for him to see again. The pacer had not yet been relieved of its saddle. "Is that the horse?"

"May it please the Sword of the Faith, the white charger was mine and is now thine."

"How was it bred? Has it been long in thy hand?"

"As to the blood strain I know not, but I had it of a dealer of Sivas, and for four years it has carried me."

"Nay," murmured Arak Buka, "the white horse bears the brand of the Ghirei clan of Tartars. Look upon its flank."

Zain ad-Din's dark eyes lowered and lifted again. In ten seconds he had meditated swiftly; he did not know of any brand, but he did not dare question the Khan's word.

"That mark? It was on the horse when I had it of the dealer."

"*Kai*, this horse is no more than a two-year." Suddenly Arak Buka leaned forward, his gnarled hands on his knees, his slant eyes blazing, and words hissed from his lips. "Thou hast lied! The horse is Tartar bred, and one of that breed is only taken from us by the sword. Thou hast slain my mirza."

The white faced *agha* swayed on his knees, and Murad Pasha spoke swiftly.

"So, Zain ad-Din, thy tale was false, and—thou has struck down a servant of the Khan to gain the horse. For no other reason than that, thou hast the blood of a believer upon thy hand."

His lips curved, and his dark eyes stared at his officer from drooping lids. Only his hand, caressing a dagger sheath, was tense as the talons of a hawk.

Zain ad-Din started to speak, and involuntarily his eyes sought Murad's. The blood seemed to drain from his cheeks, leaving his face a set mask, and his lips a line of pain. Twice he bent his head and murmured:

"God is one! It is true that I have slain a mirza of the great Khan to gain this horse."

Immediately Murad rose, his brow dark.

"O dog of the dunghill! Thou knowest the law of the Horde? For the thief and the slayer, death."

The *agha* folded his arms.

"I have heard, O my Pasha."

The Pasha spoke to one of his officers, who came forward with a *sipahi* and took Zain ad-Din by the arms. And the *agha* rose to his feet at once. He salaamed to Arak Buka, who watched him silently, and then turned to leave the pavilion. His step was firm and he seemed less stirred then the two who walked at his side. At the entrance he waited for the throng to give way.

Then he knelt, beyond the ropes, and for several moments lifted his hands and bent his body in prayer, his eyes toward Mecca. So still was the assemblage that the murmur of his voice carried to the Pasha—

"*Allah u kerim*—God the merciful and compassionate—"

WHEN the murmur ended, and he knelt with his clenched hands against his forehead, the *sipahi* stepped quickly behind him. In the gleam of the lanterns the arc of blue steel showed for an instant as the soldier lifted his arm, the point of the blade turned down. A quick thrust downward, a check, a final lunge. Zain ad-Din's body jerked forward, and a sigh ran through the crowd.

The *sipahi* bent forward and held up in both hands the *agha's* severed head, holding it by the ears.

"Thou hast seen!" Murad leaned toward his host. "A life taken for a life."

"Aye," said Arak Buka, and thought for a moment. "Now give me back the ten thousand pieces of gold that would have been mine."

Surprise made the Turk frown.

"O Lord of the Krim, believest thou the tale of the gold and the message that none but the Nazarenes themselves can read?"

The old Tartar indulged in one of his spells of silence, until his eyes opened and he smiled as if he saw a solution of the matter.

"I have heard, O my nephew, that thou art schooled in the writing of Stamboul and the writing of the Franks."

"Indeed, O my Khan."

Stretching forth his hand for the missive that had been given to a mollah's care, Arak Buka offered Stuart's parchment to the Turk.

"Then read, thyself, and satisfy thyself."

Murad took it in his hands and glanced at it eagerly.

"This is the common language of the Franks, by which one race writes to another and it is called Latin."

He scanned the lines, at first curiously, then with a swift and amazed stare. Motioning for a lantern to be brought, he bent over it, glancing hastily at the seal and then returning to the written lines. And Stuart, watching from the outer shadows, caught Ayub by the arm with a grip that pressed into the Cossack's muscles.

When he had finished, Murad Pasha looked up, his broad face flushed with triumph, and his dark eyes alight.

"O my Khan, this paper is not a message to thee. It is no more than an appointment to the rank of colonel, signed by the king of Poland."

A single exclamation resounded from all who had heard, and the old Tartar rose suddenly, his hand clutching at the hilt of his scimitar. His slant eyes glowed and the lines on his bronzed head deepened into a mask of rage.

"*Hai*, I have listened too long to thee, Murad Pasha. I have heard thee say thy men seized these ambassadors, not knowing. And then like a snake thou hast come to bid me slay them. Thy men were taking them to thee, not to me. Am I an addled old woman? Am I blind?"

"Nay—" the Turk held out the parchment in both hands—"the words are written—"

"Am I a twice begotten fool? God forbid! Would two Nazarenes ride into the Krim without a letter to me? I am tired of lies. I am weary of hearing talk to lead my horses into the snow!"

Murad Pasha was a man who loved best the boldest course, and now he stifled his anger while he weighed two alternatives and made his decision. He did a very simple and reckless thing. Turning away from the furious Tartar, he spoke to the throng that were now on their feet in a tumult of shouts; he threw back his head and laughed.

"O ye men of the sword, too long has this dotard ruled ye. Verily he is aged as a gray horse. He is a child, grasping at trinkets, and easily beguiled; he is a falcon with dim eyes. Choose, ye Muslimin! I have set up my standard. Come thither, ye who will ride to the holy war. And let the others who are fools come to the standard of the blind Khan."

Arak Buka became quiet instantly, and before any one could speak, he stretched out a lean arm, pointing to the pavilion entrance.

"Go!" he said slowly. "Here, thou art the guest of my *yurt*. Go to thy camp and arm thy men and then watch to see who will come to thy standard."

THROWING back his heavy *svitka*, Ayub bared his steaming chest to the cool night air and looked up at the sky aglow with starlight. He was in the saddle of his own horse again, and beside him Stuart rode the piebald wolf chaser. Ahead of them trotted a Krim mirza on his pony, the guide appointed them, to show them the way to the guest pavilion.

"As God lives, Sir Brother," the big Cossack said, loosing long pent up breath with a sigh that was like a bellow, "you will never touch death as near as that, until the grave takes you."

The throbbing in his head was echoed by the rising mutter of drums that grew louder as they penetrated the lines of *yurts*. Lanterns bobbed past them, and dust sifted over them. From far off came the other mutter that, once known, is never mistaken—the swift thudding of hundreds of horses at a gallop.

"And what now?" said the Scot.

"*Ekh ma!* The Khan has received us as ambassadors, and no man of his dare lift hand against us. We are safe in our skins."

"As long as he is the Khan."

They reined in, because their escort motioned them back. Past the end of the tent alley a dark mass rushed, visible in the star glow. Dust rose thicker, and they heard the creaking of leather, the jangle of bit chains. They saw steel lance points flash and vanish, as a regiment of horsemen went past at a gallop.

A little farther on they had to edge by the picket lines where warriors were saddling their shaggy ponies and riding off almost in silence, as if commands were things unheard of. Nor did any lights go with them. Stuart sniffed the damp air like a hunting dog nosing out a high scent, and Ayub peered about him curiously. The roar of the drums did not lessen, and now wild pipes wailed.

"Thousands are moving out," Stuart said, "and they are riding light."

"What is it?" the Cossack asked the mirza.

He did not answer, but turned aside to ascend a rise where the great drums thundered, and the pole and crosspiece of a battle standard rose, with its drooping buffalo tails against the stars. Here no lanterns gleamed, and they were challenged by unseen guards.

The mirza turned in the saddle then and pointed toward the west—as Stuart calculated quickly from the stars. Beyond the Tartar lines the plain was dark as far as the distant lights of the Turkish camp. But Stuart made out the banks of the river, and the water itself where it was churned to white foam by some unseen power. And he knew that the mounted regiments were crossing the river.

Suddenly the drums above them were silent, and other sounds reached them—a faint ululation of voices, and a single shrill cry—

"*Ghar—ghar—ghar!*"

The whole night seemed to be astir and moving toward the west, where now sounded the faint thudding of musketry.

Stuart's hand clenched upon his belt as he studied the far off flashes that lighted up clouds of rolling smoke. The cavalry of the Khan was attacking the Pasha's camp. Arak Buka had not waited for any discussion, but had launched his horsemen across the river at once. Ayub had come to the same conclusion.

"Devil take him, he's gone to tear down the standard of the Turks!"

More lights appeared, and a ruddy glow outlined the rampart of the distant camp. The Turks were starting fires, to drive away the darkness. The deeper reverberations of cannon rolled over the plain.

"Will the Horde storm the rampart?" Ayub asked the mirza.

"*Kabadir, amandja.* Perhaps; God knows."

But the Tartar remained motionless as the Scot, his slant eyes fixed on the plain. Although the wanderers were aching with hunger they did not think of food. Stuart was the first to see tiny black figures moving in front of the fires. They seemed to move very slowly and the musketry fire increased.

Then the sounds dwindled, although the fires did not die out. No more Tartars were crossing the river. The far off murmur swelled and sank. The shooting lessened and finally ceased.

"They are in," Stuart said, "or they have been beaten off."

Lights appeared in the dark plain, moving back toward the river, like fireflies crawling through the grass. It was an hour before the nearest of them reached the water, and Stuart noticed that they moved at a foot pace.

On the near bank slaves were lighting piled up brush at the fords to mark the way and presently the first men came out of the plain, walking into the water up to their waists. Their turbans and heavy breeches revealed them as Turkish infantry. But they carried no arms or packs and they came on in huddled groups.

Beside them rode armed Tartars with bundles slung upon their cruppers. When the Turks hung back at the water's edge, the riders mocked them, laughing and whirling long lances over their heads. More of the dark columns moved into the firelight—captives, sullen and surprised. Few were wounded, but all seemed dazed, as if stirred out of their sleep. Among them marched dismounted *aghas* and officers of the Pasha.

Through them galloped a warrior of the Horde, a gold mace in his hand, and an ermine *khalat* thrown over his knees. His shrill shout reached the height where Stuart watched.

"*Ohai*, ye men of the Krim! The door of looting is open! Arak Buka Khan has pulled down the standard of the Ottomans—aye, he will send them back to their galleys, barefoot and without arms!"

As if in answer to these tidings, the

kettledrums roared over their heads.

Duncan Stuart sat back in the saddle with a long sigh of contentment. He had carried out his orders, and his mission was accomplished. And the result was more than he had hoped for. Because now it was certain that the Tartars would not ride beside the Turks to the Christian frontiers. And, being young, he felt the thrill that comes to the man who has faced odds and gone ahead in spite of them.

"Well for us, Sir Brother," Ayub mused, "that the Khan took that camp. It was a rich camp, and these wasps of Tartars will think we brought them good fortune." For a moment he pondered what had happened. "Only, Murad Pasha must have been struck by madness to make up such a lie about your letter. It was a poor lie."

"Nay," Stuart smiled. "He told the truth."

"How the truth?"

"The paper was my commission as colonel, from the hand of the king, and Murad Pasha read it aright."

Gripping his beard in both hands, Ayub peered at his companion.

"But the message, the message you gave the Khan?"

"I made it up as you interpreted. And God knows," the young Scot added quietly, "that every word of it was true."

Ayub snorted, and shook his head slowly from side to side. He put his hands on his lips and looked up at the stars. Then he gripped the arm of the man whose life he had saved and whom he loved as a son.

"Devil take you!" he muttered in his beard. "You're a true Cossack—won't turn aside for anything. Said I not that we twain could find a way through where the ambassadors could not?"

"We two—" Stuart gathered up his reins and leaned forward to stroke the shoulder of the piebald wolf chaser—"and a good horse."

THE END

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Redskin Rhapsodies

IV

NOT SO BAD, at that! King Solomon—and this red Injun, we suspect—could give all us modern wise men the real lowdown on how to sheik. The tale comes across the years via Stebbings' "History of the Indians," published in 1737.

An aged Indian, who for may years had spent much time among the white people, both in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, one day observed that the Indians had not only a much easier way of getting a wife than the whites, but also a more certain way of getting a good one. For, said he in broken English, "white man court—court—may be one whole year!—may be two years before he marry! Well—may be then he get very good wife—but may be not—may be very cross! Well, now suppose cross! scold so soon as get awake in the morning! scold all day!—scold until sleep! all one—he must keep him!—White people law forbidding throw away wife he be ever so cross—must keep him always! Well, how does Indian do? Indian, when he see industrious squaw, he like, he go to him, place his two fore fingers close aside each other, make two like one—then look squaw in the face—see him smile—this is all one he say yes!—so he take him home—no danger he be cross! No, no—squaw know too well what Indian do if he cross! throw him away and take another! Squaw love to eat meat—no husband no meat. Squaw do every thing to please husband, he do every thing to please squaw—live happy."

—EMMET KARLE

Honneur et Fidélité

FROM Sidi-bel-Abbes—on the eve of Camerone Day, celebrated throughout the French Foreign Legion—Georges Surdez writes us another interesting letter. In 1863 at Camerone, Mexico, Captain Danjou's men fought against several thousand Mexicans. "There were less than sixty opposed to a whole army. Life, sooner than courage, abandoned those soldiers of France . . ." At the Sidi-bel-Abbes anniversary of Camerone Day Georges Surdez was the only outsider invited.

Night had fallen and the stars were out. Ruddy flames blazed, the torches held by Legionnaires for the torchlight parade. Spahis in red cloaks, big turbans swathing their heads, mounted on sleek horses, rode ahead and behind the Legion, sabers in hand. The red light caught the bayonets, made scintillating streaks of the cavalrymen's blades. The dust churned up by the trampling boots rose in a thin, reddish haze; the roll of drums, the blare of the bugles echoed against the houses across the Place Carnot. Green and gray shutters on the white walls; palm trees; the cool breath of the night sweeping down from the clear sky.

Unseen, but sensed, crowding the little city from street to street, from wall to wall, with their impalpable horde, marched the thousands of Legionnaires, those who died in the dunes and in the jungles, in the mountains and in the plains. Tall shakos, long blue coats crossed by white beltings, those of Algeria, Spain and Kabylia. Short, dark tunic, single pouch snug against the stomach, white gaitered, tanned under the crushed little *képi*, those who marched away to Crimea, to Italy, to Mexico, to the Army of the Loire, to the Army of the East, to the barricades of the Paris Commune.

Hundreds more, with the brand new colonial helmet forming a white pyramid on the pack, off to Dahomey, to the Soudan, to the Tonkin, to Madagascar, to China. Green epaulettes, blue *capotes*, Lebel rifles, those starting for the Great War, to Artois, Alsace, Champagne, the Somme, Picardy, Vauxail, Verdun, to Sebdul Bahr, Salonika, Macedonia.

Thinner, suppler khaki column, three abreast, off to Syria, to the Tonkin border, to the Middle Atlas, to the Riff. The Legion . . .

This year, as the bulk of the Legion usually quartered at Bel-Abbes was at Camp Bedeau for maneuvers (Bedeau is boiling at noon, freezing at night) the ceremonies were strictly private; no one not connected with the Legion could attend. Through Lieutenant Merolli, I asked Colonel Rollet's permission, nevertheless. And I received not merely permission, but a signed invitation, the only one granted. I am saving it preciously. It bears the famous scrawl that signed so many orders which made history, when Rollet commanded the March Regiment on the Western Front.

Colonel Rollet is a bearded, swarthy soldier, with gaunt cheekbones and splendid blue eyes. Providence took care to make him short of stature, that others might see the enemy over his head. His glance reaches the soul, his handshake is firm, and one is instantly, completely won. It would be easy to be brave to please him, even for one not poured in the mold of a hero. Everywhere he is called '*Le Père Rollet*'—Father Rollet. And with that, the true courtesy of a real French gentleman. He was busy, surrounded by officers; there was a general present; yet he remembered me, singled me out as his guest and asked me if I had liked the show.

A good show. Songs, monologues, dancing acts, acrobats, a boxing bout—which ended in a knockout in the second round—a fencing match that drew short yells of appreciation from the expert public, sketches about the officers, a German comic artist who drew laughter and applause. From the start, when all stood to hear the "Legion's March," to the final tableau, an episode of the combat at Camerone, all was well done, perfectly carried out.

—GEORGES SURDEZ.

Ants and Sharks

COMRADE O'HARA of Coogee, Australia, adds a few notes on these hungry pests of land and sea.

I've just finished reading a letter in *Adventure*, from a Geelong, Australia, man telling of his experience with ants. Well, here's some more about the little devils.

There are over three hundred known varieties, all pugnacious. A little bulldog, half an inch long and standing a quarter of an inch high in his stocking feet, can lift a 200-lb. man three feet off the ground with one playful nip.

When the Overland Telegraph Line was being constructed over two thousand miles of wilderness the local ants ate down the poles as fast as they could be erected, with the result that iron poles had to be shipped thousands of miles to replace them. This is an historical fact. These ants also build nests twenty feet high; they look like miniature mountains.

Talking of ants reminds me of the poem of the Mooki River:

"Where the wily free-selectors all wear armor
plated pants,
"To defy the stings of scorpions and the bites of
bulldog ants."

They'd need them, too.

I read recently in *Adventure* that shark fishing could not be done profitably in the U S.A. However, there's plenty of the cows out here. In fact, all the Sydney beaches have a shark tower provided with a lookout man and a bell. It is this man's duty to ring the bell when a shark is sighted and the bathers then hop out of the water as quick as they can. There were several shark tragedies out here last year.

In one day a trawler netted over thirty man-eaters just off Bondi, one of Sydney's most popular bathing resorts, where thousands surf every day in summer. The skin is tanned for leather, the flesh is made into fertilizer, and the fins and tail sent to China, for soup for the élite there.

—PATRICK O'HARA.

And—

SINCE we're on the subject of sharks—and natural history generally—Comrade Harriman has a word to say about the man-eaters. With his letter was a clipping of a dispatch from Lisbon, saying that the remains of a human being had been found inside a shark captured in the Bay of Tarrfal, Cape Verde Islands.

Hello, Camp-Fire bullies;

Here I come to register a kick, à la Teddy. The nature faker is still existent and now he roars his beliefs for big money since the first class rate magazines buy his emanations.

One explorer made the nation believe that a shark will not attack a human being, then wrote me that he has a list of eight cases where he did attack. If eight, why not eighty? How can any man be sure a beast will act thus and so in all cases, when he can not possibly prognosticate the acts of a human in that manner. It is manifestly absurd to fix the rules arbitrarily, when beast nature varies as the human.

Then one man howled at me, because I told how my cousin Mary lay in her bed and peered through between logs in a cabin wall, watching wolves circle the cabin in large numbers—she believed 40 to 50. Because there are rarely more than a half dozen seen at once in these days, he believed no pack exceeded that in 1854 in the buffalo country.

Some hoot at the idea of giant octopii, yet one was killed this year near San Francisco, 17 feet tip to tip. Yours for common sense,

—E. E. HARRIMAN.

The Belgian Solution

RECENTLY the King of Belgium announced the reservation of a large park in the Congo as a sanctuary for African wild beasts, where lions will be safe from the sportsmen for all time. Of course, such cornering of dangerous wild life could never apply to sharks; but the following letter from Alaska reminds us that some day something similar may have to be done about the biggest dangerous creature of America—the much-discussed Kodiak bear.

I've sat around a good many camp-fires, but this is the first time for me at this one. And I'll take it kindly of you if nobody hands me a match to start my own.

From where I've been sitting I heard an argument about protecting the Kodiak Brown Bear, and it sounded about as reasonable as if somebody made a motion to protect rattlesnakes and wolves and wharf rats.

I was over to Kodiak and Afoynak and in fact every island in the group last summer and I heard and saw what those bears can and will do. There's a man by the name of Walker over in Kishuyak Bay that lost twenty head of cattle alone and I saw the carcasses myself, and if there's any doubt let anybody write to the man himself (Mr. Walker, Kodiak, Kodiak Island, Alaska.) The bears even got so bold they came right into the town of Afoynak in broad daylight and chased the people into the houses.

It seems to me that the people that live there ought to have some protection instead of every time a bear kills a person or they wake up in the morning and find their stock dead to go out and hunt the bear that did the dirty work and chances are they'll get an innocent bear at that. At any rate that wouldn't bring the person or cattle to life anyway.

The meat and hide of the bear has no economical value, so why make those people suffer so that a few sportsmen can go up there just for the fun of killing one or two bears? That doesn't sound reasonable nor sportsmanlike either, does it?

It's lots of fun killing rattlesnakes too, so why not protect them also? Because if rattlesnakes are not protected they'll be extinct and look at the pleasure that will be taken away from sportsmen so-called. Seems to me that we ought to let the people who have to live with these animals decide whether or not they should be gotten rid of, and not outsiders.

What do you think about it? —W.G.

Uh-huh!

A MONTH or so ago Comrade Richardson, who is more of a purist than most of our writers, or editors, inquired of our readers whether these grunts (*uh-huh*, *huh-huh*, *uh-uh*, etc.) are peculiar to our own race or country, or whether they are a remnant of primitive speech and common to all mankind. He favored *m-hm*, *hmp-m*. It will be remembered that Comrade Richardson has an aversion to *uh*'s. He didn't like *yuh* at all; so now we try to hold to *you* and allow the reader to do his own pronouncing.

At that time I remarked that we pride ourselves on the plain fact that most men, from sixth-graders to Ph.D's, do understand and enjoy our yarns. Here is a letter from a man born in Hungary, confirming our belief that our few liberties with speech are easily understood. He also answers the question as to how much of the world grunts when it is lazy, colloquial or atavistic.

A. T. Richardson's letter in Camp-Fire interested me very much, as I have been a reader of *Adventure* since 1914. I can not remember missing one copy. When first I started to read *Adventure* I could hardly read English. It was, in fact, almost painful, as I only came to these shores in 1912. But now it's easy sailing, as I was only fourteen years old when I landed. But it gets my goat when some people start an argument over an author's mistake or spelling, as I never let a mistake puzzle me. If I get hold of a story now that I have read in 1914 I know it in ten seconds. Referring to A. T. Richardson on the following, *m-hm* and *hmp-m*, etc., I can say that, being born in Hungary and speaking four languages there, I know our boys. We used *h-hm* and all the rest in all languages. I am speaking for Hungarians, Serbs, Rumanians and Germans. Let's hear from some [illegible]e.—NICHOLAS F. KELLER.

JOHN BOOTH'S RIDE

In Texas on the Trinity, many's the year agone,
A neighbor died by a neighbor's gun before his own was drawn.
Oh, Gedrie was the killer's name, the dead man's name was Booth.
"I'll kill you some day for this deed!" Thus spoke a twelve-year youth.

Three hundred miles from the Trinity, where wolves and coyotes roam,
The widowed mother of Johnny Booth now went to make her home.
Time built Booth's boy into a man, a goodly lad and strong . . .
From war he came back west again to right his father's wrong.
On the Nueces and the Trinity it was the fall of year
When John sent Gedrie warning that his day of death was near.

"Oh, take this shotgun out with you!" Thus spoke old Gedrie's wife.
"John Booth has sworn to kill you, and mayhap 'twill save your life!"
A laugh was Gedrie's answer, with his six-gun at his thigh.
"John Booth is ten days' ride away! Fear not, I shall not die!"

Home came his horse at dawn-a-break, his saddle red with gore,
But Gedrie came not home with him, and he never came home more.

Just two scant days ere Gedrie died, so swore a dozen men,
John Booth was on the Nueces, and in two days more, again.

"In four days no man rides so far," said twelve good men and true.
"John Booth did not kill Gedrie, though he'd threatened so to do."

Oh, John Booth said not yea nor nay, yet walked he stiff and sore . . .
Who knows how far a man may ride to pay up such a score?
Six hundred miles . . . two dozen friends, with each a horse to spare . . .
At Jim's a good gray gelding, at McKay's a golden mare . . .
And each with saddle ready, and a ready hand, forsooth,
To speed the son who rode to slay the murderer of Booth.

At dawn, at dark, at dead of night, at sweating noon of day,
He drifted swift as any wolf across the long lone way.
Thus eastward to the Trinity; thus back, his duty done.
A ride no man might hope to make was made by Booth's brave son!

Those pounding hoofs of vengeance echo ghostly through the night.
Sometimes the crowded highway knows their dust in broad daylight,
As old men tell the tale again, and, inward-looking, see
The ghost of Booth speed eastward to his tryst on Trinity!

—S. OMAR BARKER

From the Highlands

DR. ROBERTSON reminisces of the old days when, as ship's surgeon, he went around the world in sail.

Taking it by and large, *Adventure* is by far the finest of all the shilling journals on either side of the pond, appealing as it does to one like myself, who is half Australian, the other half Highland—a good mixture they say.

Anyhow we hielan folk get on 'Gey sonsy' in the States. We are much alike, that I know for a fact.

I am one of the very few laymen who have done the round-the-world trip in sailer—the old *Loch Ness* in 1899. Billy, or rather William Martin, Master.

I have often thought of sitting down and doing a small reminiscence of my medical experiences on sailer where we had one old chest containing any amount of Black Draught, Seidlitz Powders, Epsom Salts, etc. What a difference to the up to date dispensaries on the 1st class liners of today, on which I have also served as surgeon.

My granddad was Governor of Tasmania in the early Colonial days. Dad was born in Government House, Sydney, so the Colonial association is ancient.

But, enough of my blethers. I know you like to hear from appreciative readers across the Western Ocean, so that's my excuse for writing.

As the Arab says, "May your shadow never grow less", or as Pat hath it, Pat from Ireland, I mean, "Moore power to yur elbow".—PAGE ROBERTSON

He Didn't Learn About Women From Her

THE ENGLISH girl in "Oom Paul's Gold" didn't strike Mr. Robson as a very real character, which led him to make some frank and sincere criticism of most of the women in *Adventure.*

I got through the novelette in the July 15th issue, "Oom Paul's Gold," without suffering too much anguish. By which I mean that the story was briskly told, and demonstrated a real Boer knowledge of Zulus and the Zulu language. But, suffering cats, the plot was pure Haggard; the characters of the dark queen and the white adventurers were no less so. Only Umslopogass was missing. I have no serious objection to this sort of thing when it is well done. But in one respect the author failed lamentably. The love interest was about as insipid, forced and all around phony as it is possible for a love interest to be. Haggard never threw us down in this way. When he created a heroine, or even a minor female character, she was a real *woman*—not a creature of straw, like the absurd English girl in the Boer's story. I ask you to remember She, the superb frails in *Allan Quartermain,* and Nada the incomparable brunette heroine of *Nada the Lily.*

This leads me to pick a bone with *Adventure Magazine.* If the females in your stories are false and boring, it is apparently the fault of the editor. You seem to go on the theory that husky adventurers cruise around the world, on war and hunting bent, but supremely indifferent to the ladies. Most of the yarns do not have a heroine, and when one is timidly introduced she is portrayed as a milk-and-water sap about whose head the predestined orange blossoms can be detected with fatal facility.

This is sheer bunk. I have done a lot of adventuring, have known dozens of adventurers—and I can tell the world that nearly all of us were vastly interested in the other sex. Generally, we loved not wisely but too well. We had a lot of fun out of it, however. It was just as much of a factor as any of the red blooded deeds your authors describe so romantically. I can recall meeting some darned fine, upstanding females, too—adventurers themselves—who knew how to be pals and friends, as well as sweeties. Why the devil doesn't this type get into your fiction?

You probably discourage your writers from touching this phase of the life. What's the matter? Are you afraid of the censor?

I'm not asking for mushy love stuff, but if your subscribers wouldn't enjoy a realistic, carefree slant on sex I miss my bet. An old friend,

—U A. ROBSON

Thank you, Brother Robson. We don't agree with your estimation of the women in our stories—but we are open to suggestions. Many contented readers constantly assure us that they favor *Adventure* because it is a relief from the love story literature that abounds everywhere. As to women: we insist that love interest be subordinated to the action-adventure element. Beyond that, our policy allows considerable leeway for a carefree slant on sex. A woman character, intrinsically, of genuine worth to a story, may be developed—and often is—into a rôle as important as that of a man. To introduce a more involved "problem" atmosphere into the treatment of women by our authors would, we believe, destroy a unique and desirable tradition.

—ANTHONY M. RUD

ASK Adventure

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

Maryland

A FINE State for the truck farmer.

Request:—"Would you please inform me in regards to the fruit and truck farming in Maryland? I would like to locate in a good fruit and gardening State."
—ALBERT CARROLL, Toledo, Ohio.

Reply, by Mr. Lawrence Edmund Allen:—Southern Maryland offers good opportunities to any one who is interested in the growing of fruit and truck gardening. Montgomery and Prince George's Counties close to Washington and Baltimore, provide some good chances and assure you of markets for your produce.

Apples, pears, peaches, grapes and small fruits can be grown with profit in this section. Maryland summers are long, and the growing season in the southern part of the State is about 220 days. The winters are mild, no extremes of heat or cold. The climate is temperate and pleasant.

Truck farming is carried on rather extensively, and a variety of crops can be grown. Lands particularly suited to wheat, rye, oats, barley, are available. Tobacco is a very profitable crop in this section, in fact, one of the big money crops.

Freedom of the Seas

IT IS a ringing and much quoted phrase, but history has shown that in time of war it means very little.

Request:—"What does 'Freedom of the Seas' mean? I've always been of the impression that outside of the three mile limit the sea was free to any man so long as he was in honest business."
—EDWARD C. HOLLAND, Staten Island, N. Y.

Reply, by Lieut. F. V. Greene:—It is a definite and well established rule of international law that the high seas are not and never can be under the sovereignty or legal jurisdiction of any one state or group of states. The high seas are constituted by all the waters that lie beyond the jurisdictional limits of any state.

The "Freedom of the Seas" implies the liberty of navigation and of freely taking submarine products by fishing, that a ship may proceed to any port without interference, so long as she is bound on lawful business, and as long as she complies with the international rules relating to navigation.

There are certain exceptions to the right of freedom of the seas. In time of peace there is the right of hot pursuit of vessels which have violated customs or other laws of a nation in the territorial waters of that nation, the offender can be pursued on the high seas, if she escapes from territorial waters. There is also the right of arrest in case of piracy. By treaty agreement there is the right of search and seizure in case of slave trade in certain regions. Fisheries are controlled in some places.

In time of war there is the exercise of the right of search and seizure, which are involved in operations of blockade and for the capture of contraband against neutral vessels. There is also the right of capture of belligerent vessels.

There are other exceptions also, for instance the U. S. claims a right to search vessels within twelve miles of the coast to prevent smuggling. This is an American municipal law, and has no standing in international law. Information on this can be secured from "The Tariff Act of 1922." Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., Price, 10c.

The United States has been given the right by treaty to stop British vessels up to a distance from shore that the vessel could steam in one hour. Great Britain, Liquor Smuggling Treaty, Government Printing Office, 5c.

In time of war the "Freedom of the Seas" means very little. During the Russo-Japanese War the belligerents declared that the waters around the seat of war in Manchuria was a closed zone, and that any neutral vessel entered it at its peril. Germany violated it by sinking vessels both belligerent and neutral without warning. In the same war Great Britain made up a list of articles that were contraband of war which consisted of nearly everything that is carried by ships at sea, and proceeded to hold up almost every ship that neared European waters, and holding them sometimes for months before releasing them. Sometimes they took over the cargoes, paying what they wished for them, otherwise they simply confiscated them.

So you see that in time of war the "Freedom of the Seas" means very little. The United States and other powers have tried to get agreements made that will protect neutral goods and ships during war, but, even if they do get an agreement made, it will still mean nothing if war comes.

We even had one period where American merchant vessels were captured and brought in as prizes by our own war vessels and privateers. During the war of 1812 the New England States and New York sold the British most of the provisions that their armed forces used in the operations against the United States. Along the Canadian boundary live cattle were driven across the line, and other provisions were carted over and sold to the British. Those engaged in this trade that were away from the boundary sent ships to sea with goods for sale to them. If any of these vessels were caught by our armed ships they were captured.

One instance of this occurred on July 11, 1812. The United States Privateer *Atlas*, Captain David Naffitt, captured the merchant ship *Tulip*, Captain Monk, just out of New York. She carried a British license that safeguarded her from capture by British war ships, and had one thousand four hundred barrels of flour, and a quantity of salt beef for the British. This capture was certainly justified.

Brazil

THE native hunters and fishers are not what an American would call sportsmen, exactly.

Request:—"I am interested in securing information regarding a hunting and fishing trip in Brazil."

—FRANK WINCH, New York, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—Mr. Paul Vanorden Shaw has just returned from a trip and finding himself piled up with mail has asked me to bat a few for him. Yours is right over the plate, for you ask for definite information. However, you do ask for a gob of it, for Brazil is larger than the U. S., almost as large as Canada, and could you tell a man offhand all the various sorts of game in the U. S.

For the particular part of Brazil I was in, headwaters of the Yguazzu, and southern states of Parana, and Rio Grande do Sul, it runs to ostrich, guanaco, and puma, which latter is mighty good eating, especially the fat ribs roasted *a là guach, con cuero* or with the hide on. A bit further north you begin to strike the tropical game such as tapir, peccary, monkeys, deer, a sort of bear, giant water rabbit, waterhog, wart hog, etc.

I think you will find a better list than I can give in the *fauna* sub-head in the "Encyclopedia Britannica."

Classifying the fish found in the waters of Brazil would be a task too vast for one gifted with but one head and one pair of hands and forced to make a living at something else. Also the waters round about Brazil. Very few, if any rods, are used for river fishing. The Indians of the upper Amazon and Paraguay basins use poison berries and bark pounded up and thrown into still pools. There is positively no fishing for sport in Brazil as we know it here.

Dog

PERFECT markings do not necessarily stamp an animal as one of the canine aristocracy.

Request:—"Just recently I was given a large black and silver colored police dog. I have reasons to believe him of good parentage, though there are no papers on him to my knowledge. The one from whom I got him said he understood the original owner as having said he was of Belgian stock.

Could you tell me which breed of the police dog has the black face and brindle effect of black and silver? The whole head to the ears (ears included) are black. Behind the ears and over the rest of his body he has the mottled effect before mentioned.

When I bathed him I found three or four spots on his front legs and one black leg where the hair had fallen out. Though the skin is smooth, and not inflamed, I wondered if it were the beginning of some type of mange or other dog disease and whether, or not, it could be checked by proper soap in his bath and proper diet. I was told to give him plenty of vegetables, mild, cooked eggs, etc., but to *avoid* white potatoes and raw meats.

If you can give me any information concerning his diet and these spots I spoke of, also if his size and weight are near what they should be, I will be sincerely grateful."

—MRS. E. F. BALDOCK, Key West, Florida.

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—Your description covers one type of the Belgian police dog, but you can not tell pure breeding accurately without certified pedigree. That is why registration or stud books were established. Many grade dogs show as good if not better type and markings sometimes than the pure breeds. It is the way nature has of causing accidents in breeding, but they are unable to reproduce their type and markings, as a rule.

Do not be afraid of giving your dog fresh meat. It is the natural food of dogs, and one reasons why so many dogs become anæmic is on account of lack of it. But fed too much, especially if they are kept in the house and have not sufficient exercise, they give forth a disagreeable odor. Most cereals are good, potatoes and corn meal ought to be eliminated. Table scraps when small bones, like chicken bones are kept out of it make good food. The problem of one dog generally is solved by table scrap. Milk and eggs help much in the food problem.

It may be possible that your dog is developing mange. Dip him in one of the coal tar dips, and if this does not ward it off, write me and I will send you receipt for an almost infallible cure, unless it is a case of follicular mange, which is exceedingly difficult to cure.

Canoe

THE best kind for fast water.

Request:—"Would ask your opinion of a fourteen foot canoe for fast water. Flat bottom, or 'V'? Advisability of fore and aft decked construction, other than protection to duffle. Wood or canvas? Weight? Cruising equipment?

—F. B. THOMSON, San Diego, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar S. Perkins:—A fourteen foot canoe is all right for one man, but if two are making the trip would suggest a sixteen foot craft, as it has more pliability and is steadier.

You have me on a flat or "V" bottom canoe; they are all more or less flat, except some are deeper amidships. Naturally in fast water you will use a narrower and deeper draft canoe, as they handle faster and guide easier in fast water. Being deeper, they have a much higher tumblehome and are a dryer boat. You would want a typical river model canoe, although a guide model will serve the purpose.

No construction other than to protect duffle is necessary; in fact a tarp lashed over the duffle will do for that and give you more freedom and room in the canoe.

I am enclosing the customary list for cruising equipment, assuming that your experience enables you to cover the ration question and personal items. Woolen garments are considered standard woods and water clothing.

Get a canvas canoe by all means, in case you hit the rock instead of missing it, a can of marine glue will start you on your way again. Wooden canoes are too hard to patch.

Canoes, new, should weigh, 14 and 15 foot—50 lbs.; 16 ft.—60 lbs.

War Bonnets

ONCE it was the badge of courage and manhood. Now it is no more than a fancy article of dress in the wardrobe of the well turned out Indian, and has even come to be called the "Indian's tuxedo".

Request:—"What was the range of the eagle plume war-bonnet? (i.e. was it peculiar to the horse tribes? Was it worn by the Apaches and Paiutes in the Southwest? How far East did it come toward the Woods Culture areas? How far did it penetrate in the Southeast, towards the Seminoles?)"

—G. E. S. TURNER, Oxford, England.

Reply, by Mr. Arthur Woodward:—The far famed eagle plume war-bonnet so renowned in story and movie was essentially a Plains product. The tribes wearing it were the Dakota, Cheyenne, Crow, Pawnee, Arapaho, Shoshone, Blackfoot Assiniboin and Arikara. It did not penetrate the Eastern or Southern Woodlands. At a later date and today the bonnet is worn by nearly every tribe. It is no longer significant as a bit of paraphernalia other than a mere head covering. Ethnologists term it the "Indian tuxedo". Every well dressed Indian will wear one. In a general way, your designation "horse tribes" covers the range of the bonnet, since the best horsemen were those ranging the Plains in pursuit of the buffalo.

Primarily the bonnet was a badge of manhood. It denoted the fighter and could not be worn or owned by any man who had not proved his worth on the war trail. Not every man could make a bonnet. Not every man could trap eagles. In the old days eagles had to be caught alive, by hand and strangled before the feathers could be obtained. This eagle trapping was sacred and dangerous work. It entailed personal sacrifice, fasting and nerve.

In trapping eagles, a shallow pit was excavated on the top of a hill in a country frequented by eagles. This pit was made just large enough to accommodate a man lying down on his back or sometimes sitting upright. Small saplings were laid in a framework over the top of the pit, this in turn was covered by boughs and grass. A rabbit or chunk of fresh meat was tied to the framework, the eagle trapper, after a purification ceremony in a sweat lodge and many prayers, got into the pit carrying a bundle of artemesia.

When the eagle alighted on the bait the man reached his hand through the leaves, grasped the eagle's legs and drew the bird down, at the same time thrusting the bundle of sage at it. Generally the bird snapped at the sage and then the trapper strangled it. Sometimes the birds got their feet loose or the trapper was not fortunate enough to grasp both legs. The flailing talons, razor sharp, raked the naked thighs of the trapper and there have been instances where the hunters have had arteries pierced and they bled to death. Others have had tendons in their hands severed and were cripples for life. So, you see, in the old days an eagle bonnet meant something.

THEN too, the bonnet was valued more for its protective power than anything else. A good war bonnet was endowed with supernatural protective agencies. This might take the form of the powers given it by the favored medicine man who made the head gear or the amulet fastened to the bonnet itself. Frequently the dried body of a small hawk was affixed to the head band just over the forehead. One old brave, a Cheyenne I believe he was, boasted that in a fight all the feathers of his bonnet was clipped away by enemy balls but neither he nor the hawk amulet was touched. Roman Nose, the Cheyenne leader, had a tabu attached to his bonnet. He must never eat any food taken from the fire with an iron implement. On the morning he went into battle with Forsyth's troops at Beecher Island, he was told that he had been served some bread lifted from the fire with an iron fork, when he heard this he immediately said, "I will be killed today." On his first charge against the cavalrymen he was clipped through the body by riflemen hidden in pits just outside the low breastworks. He died before sunset.

The old time bonnets had white weasel skins dangling from the head band near each ear. Even these ornaments were valued for the the protective powers they gave. The weasel was looked upon by most tribesmen as being the fiercest, most cunning fighter of all animaldom. A man bearing the name of Weasel was rated highly for his bravery and his cunning. Today the bonnet is just a decorative bit of standardized costume. It means no more to the average Indian than the bit of chain does on the uniform of certain of your own cavalry regiments, hangovers from the days when men wore shirts of mail as protective coverings.

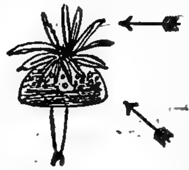
Certain of the Eastern tribes did wear a type of feather bonnet but they are not to be compared with the graceful, nodding plumed affairs of the Plains. The Shawnee, Delaware (perhaps) Pamunkey and others had headgear fashioned from feathers that stood up stiff and straight around the head. However, these feathers were of the hawk, the crane, the flicker and other smaller birds. I have seen an old Shawnee war bonnet and it was a dingy looking affair when compared to a Dakota war bonnet. The nearest approach to a plains bonnet I ever saw (and it was not constructed the same) was a tall, fine looking headgear taken from a mummy bundle in Peru. The base was cane and cotton cord. The feathers stood up in a circle, looking like an ultra-stiff Assiniboin bonnet. The back trail was a wide piece of cotton cloth covered with a mosaic of colored feathers, a beautiful piece and nearly perfect.

The Paiute of Nevada and Utah did wear a bonnet but it was of the same nondescript type as those favored by the Eastern Woodland peoples.

The Apache war cap is entirely different. It was simply a close fitting skull cap of buckskin, tied under the chin with a thong. From the crown jutted a tufted bunch of feathers, short and stiff, sometimes notched and split. It greatly resembled the Iroquois war cap save that the Iroquois cap was fashioned over a framework of elm bark and had a central slanting eagle feather set in a socket and swivel. The appended sketch of the various types of bonnets will tell you the story. The Apache caps were generally painted in red, yellow and green outline figures.

Many Apaches wore no headgear, just a simple white or red rag fillet around the head. The Zuni war caps, likewise the Hopi were similar to the Apache. So are some of the headgears of the tribes in northern California. The Seminoles of Florida, being offshoots of the Creeks, did not wear warbonnets. They affected head fillets or turbans with feathers, thrust upright in them. Prior to the latter day spread of the war bonnet, the eagle plume headgear did not exist outside the Plains area. It did not cross the Mississippi River to the East and did not get into the New Mexico-Arizona territory. Northward it did not penetrate beyond the Cree country as far as I know.

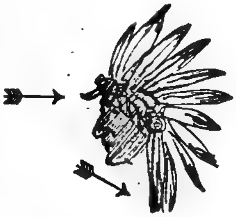
APACHE WAR CAP



Hawk, flicker crow, etc., feathers split, notched, etc. fastened in one tuft to bob loosely on crown of cap.

Painted or beaded design, sometimes holes are cut in buckskin

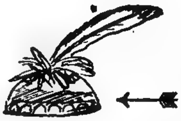
PLAINS BONNET



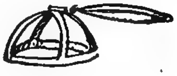
Position of hawk skin or other amulet

Ermine or white weasel skins

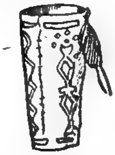
IROQUOIS WAR CAP



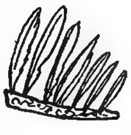
Eagle feather on swivel silver band added circa 1790-1800



Framework of elm bark in Iroquois cap—formerly covered with deer or beaver skin. In historic times replaced with cloth



Circular rawhide carrying case for bonnet when not in use. Bonnet is rolled and thrust in lengthwise



Meager, stiff, small feathered bonnet of certain eastern woodland tribes

Sheep

ON raising them for profit.

Request:—"I would like some information regarding sheep raising. I have been connected with an industry in which wool is used extensively and found that most of it came from Texas and New Mexico. Do you think that sheep could be raised for profit in the vicinity of Asheville, N. C.? I have no knowledge of sheep or their habits and therefore any information would be of value."

—J. A. ROSEMAN, Glenville, Conn.

Reply, by Mr. Frank Earnest:—I can see no reason why sheep could not be raised profitably in any section of the United States. I am not familiar with the topography or climate of North Carolina, so I can not tell you specifically the number of sheep a person could run in the particular section you speak of, as there are no free Government lands in North Carolina, and you must have grazing land for sheep. In the Western States where sheep are raised extensively, the largest part of grazing land is free range. That is, it is open to settlement and is public domain.

Sheep thrive on most any fodder, such as brush, grasses, sage, etc., and require but very little attention. They are not subject to many diseases with the exception of scab, which I believe has been very nearly eradicated. You can figure about one acre of good grazing land for one sheep, for one year. The grasses are better when not too high, as sheep eat very close to the ground, so grass that is from one to three inches high is the best grazing for them. If run in a pasture, they require no attention whatever, unless there are predatory animals. Salt is the only food they require besides grazing, if the snow is not too deep for them to rustle.

They are not sheared until they are a year old. Generally, sheep are shorn but once a year, in the spring months. However, I understand they shear them twice a year in California. Mutton sheep are shorn at the stock yards where they are sold.

In the Western States, sheep are run in bands of from two to four thousand. There is a sheep or camp wagon (a regular horse on wheels), a man to move the wagon, haul supplies, etc., and a herder to herd the band. They move from place to place.

Merino and Rambouillet produce the best wool, but are the poorest mothers. Shropshire and Cotswold are good mothers, and produce very good wool. They require attention of course, during lambing, as the young lambs are very delicate. I think you might do well with a band of 500.

Sheep men in the West figure that the wool pays all running expenses, and the increase as profit. A good many ewes bear twins, and with a small band you could probably figure on 110 to 120 per cent. increase, possibly more. 90 to 100% is what the Western sheep men figure. Write to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., and ask them to send you whatever bulletins they have on sheep. Also write Superintendent of Documents, Gov't Printing Office, Washington, D. C., for a list of Government publications. Some are free, others there is a small charge for.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extend of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A Complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE TRAIL AHEAD

The next issue of
ADVENTURE
October 15th

CORPORAL DOWNEY, grizzled veteran of the Mounted, eyed the rookie.

"From what you've seen and heard, you believe Louis Gagnon was murdered by François Dechamps. That's funny, because from hearing and seeing exactly the same things, I ain't even got a suspicion that François done it. . . ."

A gripping novelette of the Canadian Outlands by one of the best writers of the North.

The WHITE WOLF

by JAMES B. HENDRYX

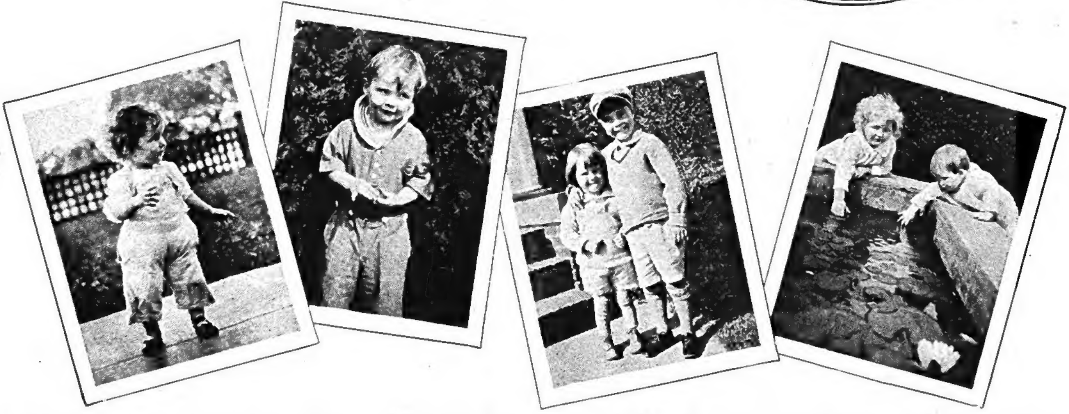
Also TWO OTHER SPLENDID NOVELETTES—"NAPOLEON THE LITTLE", A STORY OF THE BORDER CAVALRY, BY MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON * * * "DARKENED SEAS", A STORY OF A FATEFUL ENCOUNTER OFF THE STEAMER TRACK, BY RALPH R. PERRY.

And—Other Good Stories

Black, Red and White, a story of the Senegalese Tirailleurs, by Georges Surdez; The Kid From The Brazos, a story of Killer Reeves' son, by B. M. Bower; Tusks and Ticals, a tale of the teak forests, by Reginald Campbell; Nice Vedder, a story of the Chicago Loop, by Frank J. Schindler; It Has Its Points, a story of war, by Clements Ripley; Pearls à La Mode, a story of the prize ring, by Max Wilkinson; and Part II of "The Invisible Guns of Kabul," a novel of the Khyber Pass, by Talbot Mundy.

SNAPSHOTS
don't grow up

When your Boy becomes a Man
and your Girl becomes a Woman
you'll wish for more reminders of
their childhood days



LATER on, when they step out for themselves, snapshots of their early years will become your most precious possession.

Today you are looking ahead. Tomorrow you'll want to look back, to see them as they are now, as they will never be again.

This is the time when your Kodak can be of greatest help, the time to take more snapshots than you have ever taken before.

Children Today—Adults Tomorrow

They change so quickly. You can almost *see* them getting taller, broader, more mature. Perhaps now you're tucking them into bed, buttoning up their clothes, cutting up their meat in little pieces, and keeping them away from open windows. But in only a few years more they'll be telling *you* what to do and looking the part.

When your Boy becomes a Man and your Girl becomes a Woman you'll wish for more reminders of their childhood days. Don't leave this wonderful period to the fickleness of memory. Keep your Kodak next to your hat and coat. Then you won't miss any picture chances because you meant to bring it with you but forgot.

Don't Wait for Sunshine

Then, too, snapshots are fun to take. That is another reason for the extraordinary popularity of Kodaks. They are on sale everywhere and at prices that do their bit toward bringing down the high cost of living. The Brownie, a genuine Eastman camera, sells for as little as $2, and Kodaks as low as $5.

What's more, your dealer can show you Eastman cameras that actually increase your picture-taking opportunities. These are the Modern Kodaks. Many have lenses so fast that you don't have to wait for sunshine. Everyone can take good pictures, indoors, outdoors, on cloudy days and brilliant ones, with these marvelous new Kodaks. Ask to see them.

And when you've obtained your Kodak you can rely on Kodak Film to record your subjects the way you see them in the finder. Kodak Film has speed and wide latitude, both of which minimize the danger of under- and over-exposure. *It gets the picture.* Then the developing and printing of your films will be quickly and skilfully handled by any of the thousands of expert photo finishers whose stations are located throughout the country. You'll find one not far from your home.

·KODAK·

ONLY EASTMAN MAKES THE KODAK

• • •

EASTMAN KODAK Co., Dept. 246
Rochester, N. Y.

Please send me, FREE and without obligation, the booklet telling me about the Modern Kodaks.

Name ....

Address 29

"Reach for a **Lucky** - instead of a sweet"

LUCKY STRIKE
"IT'S TOASTED"
CIGARETTES
TWENTY

Billie Burke

Billie Burke
Popular American Actress

Toasting takes out every bit of bite and throat irritation

"It's toasted"

No Throat Irritation-No Cough.

© 1929, The American Tobacco Co., Manufacturers